DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 344 245 CS 213 327

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Strickland, James, Ed. |
| TITLE | English Leadership Quarterly. 1991. |
| INSTITUTION | National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL. Conference on English Leadership. |
| PUB DATE | 91 |
| NOTE | 65p.; Formerly called the "CSSEDC Quarterly." |
| PUB TYPE | Collected Works - Serials (022) |
| JOURNAL CIT | English Leadership Quarterly; v13 n1-4 Feb-Dec 1991 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Class Activities; English Departments; *English Instruction; *Labeling (of Persons); Literature Appreciation; Secondary Education; *Whole Language Approach |
| IDENTIFIERS | English Teachers |

ABSTRACT

These four issues of the English Leadership Quarterly represent the quarterly for 1991. Articles in number 1 deal with whole language and include: "CEL: Shorter and Better" (Myles D. Eley); "Toward a New Philosophy of Language Learning" (Kathleen Strickland); "Whole Language: Implications for Secondary Classrooms" (Barbara King-Shaver); "Whole Language: Moving to a Whole New Neighborhood" (Bill Newby); "Student Writers Set Their Own Goals" (Sharon Wieland); "Assessment in a Whole Language Environment: Teaching Students to Document Their Own Writing Progress" (Edgar H. Thompson); and "Returning Vocabulary to Context" (Carol Jago). Articles in number 2 deal with learning labels and include: "Unmasking Psycho/Biological Labels for Language Acts" (Cornelius Cosgrove); "'Skills Kids' and Real Literature" (Sharon Wieland); "Tracking or Sidetracking?" (Carole Bencich); "Flor: A Learning Disabled Child in a Whole Language Classroom" (Deborah Wells); "Room to Talk: Opening Possibilities with the 'At-Risk'" (Suzanne Miller); "Do You Teach LEPs or REAL Students?" (Darlynn Fink); and "A Silent Calling: Why I Chose This Career" (Ron Goba). The changing literature classroom is the focus of number 3 and includes: "Teaching Literature, Canon Formation, and Multiculturalism" (William F. Williams); "Feminism and the Reconstitution of Family" (Jody Price); "When Whole Language Learners Reach Us: Challenges for a Changing Secondary Literature Classroom" (John Wilson Swope); "Writing about Literature with Large-Group Collaboration: The We-Search Paper" (Esther Broughton and Janine Rider); "Tying Reader Response to Group Interaction in Literature Classrooms (Edgar H. Thompson); and "Mr. C. Didn't Do It This Way" (E. Carolyn Tucker). Articles in number 4 discuss whole language, literature, and teaching and include: "Putting an End to 'Cliffs Notes' Mentalities" (Pamela Kissel); "Placing Whole Language in a Workshop Setting" (William Murdick and Rosalie Segin); "The Business of Television" (Rick Chambers); "Student Teacher Education Program" (Joellen P. Killion); "Using Computers to Foster Collaborative Learning in the Creative Writing Classroom" (Theresa M. Hune); "Sentence Combining: A Spoonful of Sugar" (Jace Condravy); "Taking Johnny Back" (Carol Jago); and "Leadership as Shared Vision" (Joseph I. Tsujimoto). (SR)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
James Strickland
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 344245
CS213337

*Leadership for Excellence*

Volume 13, Number 1
February 1991
Editor: James Strickland

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

**Conference on English Leadership (formerly: Conference for Secondary School English Department Chairpersons)**

## In This Issue

### WHOLE LANGUAGE

by James Strickland, editor

Whole language is, in many ways, a movement that encompasses all the other concerns that some of our colleagues dismissed as educational fads—process writing, freewriting, student-centered curricula and classrooms, writing to learn, teacher-researchers, sustained silent reading. The reason is that whole language is a philosophy, a theory about the way language is learned, a belief system that allows us to see the world of teaching and learning in a particular way. Usually thought of as an elementary education movement, a whole language philosophy applies to all language learning—pre–K, elementary, secondary, college, postbaccalaureate, and doctoral studies.

Whole language involves a conversion, a transformation of the way we view ourselves, our students, and what we are all about. Thus, teachers who are trying to lead their departments to adopt a whole language curriculum cannot wait for smooth transitional programs bridging the gap between traditional outcome-based behavioral approaches with the new whole language philosophy. To expect one would be somewhat like asking a trapeze artist to look for a smooth transition from one bar to the next. It does not work. At some point you have to let go of the bar and fly. (Thanks to Joe Tsujimoto for the trapeze metaphor [who admits he borrowed it from Howard Kerewsky]).

While I was caught up in theories of rhetorical invention and cognitive processes, I learned about the whole language movement from a reading and language arts methods teacher, my wife, Kathleen Strickland. Since she was the one who enlightened me, I asked her to write an article for this issue, an introduction to whole language. She obliged with a piece entitled, "Toward a New Philosophy of Language Learning."

Barbara King-Shaver, a high school English teacher at South Brunswick High School in Monmouth Junction, New Jersey, contributes an article that reflects her understanding of the whole language movement. She explores the implications whole language has for secondary classrooms, offering detailed examples of how the philosophy is applied to lesson designs for teaching the standards, such as poetic conventions and analysis of a novel.

Bill Newby, an English teacher at Shaker Heights Senior High School, located outside of Cleveland, Ohio, tells us that adopting a whole language orientation is like moving to a new neighborhood; we might miss the old house and our old life but we cannot go back. Bill, despite the nostalgia, is anxious to show off the features of the new neighborhood with a detailed tour and copious examples. Reading about his American literature classes made me almost wish I was back in high school, if just to experience *The Scarlet Letter* with his students.

Sharon Wieland, of Sacramento High School in California, asks her students to take responsibility for their own learning, asking them to set their own goals. Such a student-centered classroom is at the heart of a whole language philosophy. Herb Thompson, a former high school and college English teacher, presently the director of elementary education at Emory and Henry College in Emory, Virginia, uses a metacognitive activity

(continued on page 2)

**Inside . . .** **page number**

**CEL: Shorter and Better** . . . . . 2
by Myles D. Eley
**Toward a New Philosophy of Language Learning** . . . 2
by Kathleen Strickland
**Whole Language: Implications for Secondary Classrooms** . . . . . 4
by Barbara King-Shaver
**Whole Language: Moving to a Whole New Neighborhood** . . . . . 5
by Bill Newby
**Student Writers Set Their Own Goals** . . . . . 8
by Sharon Wieland
**Assessment in a Whole Language Environment: Teaching Students to Document Their Own Writing Progress** . . . . . 11
by Edgar H. Thompson
**Returning Vocabulary to Context** . . . . . 12
by Carol Jago
**Software Review: SEEN by Helen Schwartz** . . . . . 13
by Wendy Paterson
**Best Article Award for 1989** . . . . . 13
**Announcements** . . . . . 13
**Conference Proposal Form** . . . . . 15
**Call for Manuscripts** . . . . . 16

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

to promote a whole language approach to learning. Herb gains a wealth of information in two minutes a day by asking his students to express in a sentence the one thing they learned in their most recent writing. He calls this "teaching students to document their own writing progress." The goal setting activity of Sharon Wieland's students and the reflective activity of Herb Thompson's students help students to conceive of themselves as real writers.

Carol Jago, of Santa Monica High School in California, tackles the vocabulary problem that inevitably seems to come up for whole language teachers. Like the trapeze artist, Carol sees it is time to let go of the bar and fly, forgetting vocabulary lists and encouraging vocabulary building through real reading, returning vocabulary study to its context.

This issue also includes a short message from Myles Eley, the chair of this conference, reflecting on our recent name change and its significance; a software review by Wendy Paterson; and a proposal form for next year's annual convention, to be held in Seattle (feel free to xerox the form to preserve the wholeness of the whole language issue).

That's it. The message is trust the students; trust language learning; let go.

## CEL: SHORTER AND BETTER

by Myles D. Eley, Chair,
Conference on English Leadership

As English teachers and leaders, we probably believe as did Juliet that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." This organization and its *Quarterly* by any other names will continue the pattern of excellence you have learned to expect. It is, therefore, my pleasure to introduce you to the Conference on English Leadership and the first issue of the *English Leadership Quarterly*, both new in name, but both long in tradition.

In the December issue you read, with approval, I trust, that CSSEDC members voted in Atlanta to change the name of the organization to the Conference on English Leadership. The Executive Committee of NCTE unanimously approved the change, and we shall continue the tradition of addressing the concerns of English leaders from all levels. This is a welcomed and needed change if the name is to reflect the wide range of leaders the organization represents.

Why the changes? For several years the Executive Committee of CSSEDC discussed how inappropriate the name had become. Some members supervise K–12 programs; others have middle school responsibility; still others lead college departments of English. The membership was no longer comprised of only "secondary" people, and the name was therefore too confining. The Conference on English Leadership describes much more accurately the inclusive and broadened nature of our membership.

This is also an appropriate time to align the name of our publication with other conference journals. The Conference on English Education (CEE) uses *English Education* as the title of its journal, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) uses *College Composition and Communication*. Through *English Leadership*, we achieve a name recognition which describes the goal of CEL: to stress the importance of leadership in improving the English language arts programs in our schools.

I hope that you will find our name change (finally, a reasonable acronym!) and the new name for our publication easy to adopt. The Executive Committee pledges to you, the members of CEL, our continuing support and assistance.

## TOWARD A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

by Kathleen Strickland
Slippery Rock University, Pennsylvania

A revolution is taking place in language teaching from elementary school through the university level—whole language. Grounded in research on how children become literate, whole language is revolutionizing how reading and writing are taught as well as educators' beliefs about what the nature of reading and writing is.

Unfortunately, no simple definition exists for the term "whole language." This term does not refer to a methodology; whole language is a philosophy. It is not a program to be followed; whole language is a set of beliefs, the major tenet of which is that language is best learned in authentic, meaningful situations, ones in which language is not separated into parts. Whole language is the integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Ken Goodman in *What's Whole in Whole Language* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986) describes the insights that inform a whole language philosophy: "In homes, children learn oral language without having it broken into simple little bits and pieces. They are amazingly good at learning language when they need it to express themselves and understand others, as long as they are surrounded by people who are using language meaningfully and purposefully.

"This is what many teachers are learning again from children: keep language whole and involve children in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs. That simple, very basic discovery is leading to some dramatic, exciting changes in schools. . . . [Teachers should] invite pupils to use language. Get them to talk about things they need to understand. Show them it's all right to ask questions and listen to the answers, and then to react or ask more questions. Suggest that they write about what happens to them, so they can come to grips with their experiences and share them with others.

"Encourage them to read for information, to cope with the print that surrounds them everywhere, to enjoy a good story.

"This way, teachers can work with children in the natural direction of their growth. Language learning then becomes as easy in school as out. And it's more interesting, more stimulating, and more fun for the kids and their teachers. What happens in school supports and expands what happens outside of school. Whole language programs get it all together: the language, the culture, the community, the learner, and the teacher" (7–8).

### The Beliefs of a Whole Language Philosophy

As with any philosophy, whole language is a description of practical applications of theoretical arguments arising from research in such fields as psycholinguistics, sociology, anthropol-

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy where such endorsement is clearly specified. Copyright for articles published in *English Leadership Quarterly* reverts to the respective authors.

*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

ogy, child development, composition, literacy theory, and semiotics. From this combined research have come beliefs about language learning:

1. Students learn by constructing meaning from the world around them, a view quite different from a behaviorist view of learning by imitation. The "taxonomy of learning" of Benjamin Bloom, a follower of B. F. Skinner (the basis of a great deal of contemporary teaching and learning), is "stimulus-response" learning, based on conclusions drawn from working with animals in laboratory experiments rather than on observations of how children learn. Motivation and reinforcement are necessary for the rote learning or other pointless activities that behaviorists call learning. In the real world, not the world of laboratories, people learn what is worthwhile, useful, and easiest to learn, as Frank Smith tells us in *Joining the Literacy Club* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988).
2. Language learning is not sequential, but reading and writing skills develop simultaneously along with oral language skills. In a behaviorist classroom, reading is taught as a progression of skills through instruction in which stimuli are standardized for each skill, so that the appropriate response would be elicited in a reader, and then objectively tested in order to be certain that students are ready for the next skill. Regrettably, the teaching of writing often followed this same behaviorist premise of learning from part to whole. The subskills of spelling, grammar, and sentence structure were taught through drill and practice before students were allowed to attempt real writing. Noam Chomsky, however, showed that such behaviorist approaches trivialize language and learning.
3. Curriculum in a whole language classroom is not a prescribed course of study; instead learning occurs when students are engaged and teachers are demonstrating. Unlike the behaviorist view of learning, one in which teachers expected their students to operate within the teacher's assumptive bounds, whole language teachers provide their students with an opportunity to demonstrate what decisions they, as language users, are interested in and capable of making.
4. Language and language learning are learned best in an environment encouraging risk-taking; error is inherent in the process. Students learn in a language environment where they are given opportunities to transact with print and think of themselves as readers and writers. Students are more apt to use reading and writing strategies if they are immersed in an environment in which they see people, both students and teachers, reading and writing. The development of reading and writing depends on strategies that characterize the literary expectations of proficient language users—text intent, negotiability, risk-taking, and fine-tuning language with language itself.
5. Reading and writing are context-specific and are reflections of the situation in which learning is taking place. Harste, Woodward, and Burke clearly demonstrated in 1984 that children, as readers, transact with environmental print, and their responses were functional, categorical, or specified, depending upon the children's previous experience (*Language Stories and Literacy Lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann). Young children approach written language expecting it to make sense. This same, natural, functional approach to language learning continues as a student uses reading and writing in the whole language classroom for real purposes and for real audiences.
6. Whole language includes all aspects of language learning—students learn to read while they are writing and they learn about writing by reading. Students may also learn about reading and writing while listening, but not when listening exclusively to their teacher lecture, an activity designed to help an adult exercise his or her language abilities.

**How Can Whole Language Be Implemented?**

A cookbook approach to teaching whole language is not possible, because whole language is not a program or a method. Whole language teachers use a variety of creative and innovative methods for facilitating learning. A whole language classroom becomes an environment where students' own needs and experiences provide the motivation for reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities.

Expensive, elaborate materials are not needed when implementing whole language approaches. Students read texts that are familiar and meaningful, drawing upon familiar concepts and experiences to which they can relate. The whole language teacher does not worry about a sequence or hierarchy of skills; the curriculum is organized through shared planning between teacher and students. Risk-taking is encouraged and students learn from experience.

Given the rich variety of whole language classrooms, many share common elements:

1. In a whole language classroom, an environment is designed to promote literacy development; that is, a variety of language materials is readily available for student use, and the classroom becomes a clustering of literature and writing groups where peer groups or individuals work and teachers conference with them.
2. In a whole language classroom, students read and write every day.
3. In a whole language classroom, students have the opportunity to choose what they read and write about and choose from a variety of literature written by adult and student authors.
4. In a whole language classroom, literacy is taught in a meaningful context; there is an emphasis on meaning and "making sense" in oral and written communication.
5. In a whole language classroom, skills are taught in the context of language and not as isolated exercises.
6. In a whole language classroom, students work cooperatively in groups that are formed for many different reasons, including shared interests.
7. In a whole language classroom, teachers act as facilitators rather than dispensers of knowledge.
8. In a whole language classroom, teachers demonstrate what it means to be a reader and a writer by reading and writing in and out of the classroom and sharing these literacy experiences with their students.
9. In a whole language classroom, teachers are "kid watchers," evaluating and assessing student progress based on observation, focusing on what students can do.
10. In a whole language classroom, students are risk-takers; they see learning as an exciting opportunity for open-ended response and critical thinking.

**The Politics of Whole Language**

Politics is an integral part of any change, and the whole language movement is no exception. Whole language teachers are under constant scrutiny and pressure. Community reception to whole

language is mixed; many express suspicion of "the new program" and think that a movement back to the basics is needed, a fear reinforced by *A Nation at Risk*.

Many parents of children in whole language classes have voiced concern about "the basics," even though the students in the classrooms are learning and even performing adequately on standardized tests. Whole language teachers believe in political action when that means empowering students and allowing them the power to learn. Whole language teachers have become passionate advocates for students, for learning, and for the idea that teachers are learners in the classroom.

One of the most unusual aspects of the politics of the whole language movement is that it cannot be mandated or required, as some school systems are now discovering. Whole language is a "grass roots" movement. Changes are not coming from administrators, parents' organizations, or even the university. Changes are occurring from within the classroom. The roots of the practice—the research—must first be understood and must be the base of a personal philosophy of language learning and teaching.

The most exciting part of whole language is what is happening to students in classrooms. Many are seeing school as an exciting and stimulating place to grow and their teachers as guides who are helping them. They are seeing themselves as readers and writers and are learning to respect their own abilities in the process.

## WHOLE LANGUAGE: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY CLASSROOMS

by Barbara King-Shaver
South Brunswick High School, Monmouth Junction, New Jersey

At the beginning of class one day, I brought to the front of the room a lectern that had been standing in the corner, and I placed my notes on top of it. A student in the front of the class looked up, noticed, and said, "Oh, so you're finally going to teach today!"

This student was brave enough to express what many people believe—it's only teaching when the teacher stands in front of the room and gives information to the student. Lecterns have been a familiar sight in traditional English classrooms. They fit into a teaching philosophy that sees the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge, as someone whose job it is to tell the students what they need to know. Whole language teachers, on the other hand, see their job as coaches, as people who help students discover information as they interact with the material being studied and with each other. A teacher at a lectern giving notes to a class is not a frequent sight in a whole language classroom.

What is a whole language classroom? The term "whole language" most often brings to mind a nonbasal reading program in the elementary grades, an instructional program that integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet, whole language is more than materials and methods: it is a philosophy about language, about learning, and about teaching.

"Whole language is clearly a lot of things to a lot of people; it is not a dogma to be narrowly practiced. It's a way of bringing together a view of language, a view of learning, and a view of people, in particular two special groups of people: teachers and kids," says Ken Goodman, describing the scope of the movement in *What's Whole in Whole Language* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986, 5).

### Implications for Secondary Classrooms

Although whole language advocates have focused mainly on the elementary grades, their observations have implications for secondary classrooms as well. The interaction of kids and teachers, Goodman's two special groups of people, is as crucial to learning in grade twelve as it is in grade one. When discussing the implications for whole language in secondary classrooms, the central issue of whole language is the roles of the teacher and learner in the classroom, not the question of phonics or the basal versus nonbasal debate.

Whole language teachers support a student-centered classroom that keeps the making of meaning at the center of the learning process. Whole language teachers recognize that their job is to create an environment in which communication can take place, an environment in which students can use language to construct meaning, to learn. In a whole language classroom the learners are active participants in their own learning. Teachers help students become active learners by giving them choices and by providing them with opportunities to use language in a variety of ways: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. In a student-centered classroom the teacher's role changes. The teacher is no longer the one with all the answers, the one who, for example, must tell students everything they need to know about a novel, pointing out every symbol, conflict, character trait, and plot turn. Rather, the whole language teacher allows time and provides opportunity for students to discover these things for themselves.

When teaching a work of literature, for example, teachers need to provide students with opportunities to react to the text, interact with the text, and reflect on the text, activities that include group as well as individual experiences, since group activities are a vital part of learning. Furthermore, since knowledge is socially constructed, whole language teachers allow time for students to explore, discuss, and share ideas with each other when they are engaged in reacting, interacting, and reflecting on the text.

### Poetry in a Whole Language Classroom

In the days when teachers stood at lecterns, I used to begin a poetry unit by passing out sheets containing literary terms such as metaphor, alliteration, and personification. I asked students to define these terms and apply them to the poems we were studying in class. In restructuring my lessons to reflect the principles of whole language, I now begin with the poems, not with the literary terms. Students are given copies of poems to experience both individually and in small groups. Students discover the poetic conventions for themselves. They may not know the exact terms for the things they discover in the poems, but they are able to point out language that paints a picture for them and words that sound good together. It is after they have the opportunity to discover the language and meaning of a poem for themselves that I introduce the "proper" terms for what they have just discovered.

When studying the poem "A Certain Slant of Light," by Emily Dickinson, the students read the poem on their own at home and complete a double-entry learning log for the poem in their journals. In this learning log, they put in one column any images or words that catch their attention, sound pleasing or raise a question for them. In the second column, they write down thoughts and/or questions that occur to them as they read over the notes they made.

The next day these journal entries form the basis of discussions in small groups, as students compare their learning log entries. Students, for example, find that they all identify a rhyme pattern. The class is then able to review how rhyme schemes are identified and labeled. When they question what they see as the "breakdown" of the rhyme scheme in stanza three, this leads to the introduction of the concept of slant rhyme.

Out of personal log entries and group discussions, students direct their classmates' attention to the poetic language in lines

such as, "like the weight / Of cathedral tunes," and "tis like the distance / On the look of death." Both of these introduce the concepts of imagery and simile to the class. Discussions about phrases such as "Heavenly hurt" and "then landscape listens" lead not only to a review of alliteration, but also to metaphorical thinking, prompting questions such as, "How can heaven hurt? Is the hurt real? How can the landscape listen? In what way does a landscape listen? What does she mean the landscape listens?"

The questions the students raise are then discussed in their small groups, providing them the opportunity to explain the metaphors to each other. I do not have to begin the day by introducing or reminding them of what a metaphor is; they discover it for themselves. Giving them the term for what they have already identified is the easy part.

**Jigsawing a Novel**

In a class I recently visited, another example of a student-centered whole language classroom, the teacher was using a collaborative learning technique—"jigsawing"—to teach a difficult novel, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to a low ability English class. Traditionally only the more advanced students were given this novel to read; however, this teacher felt that his basic English class should experience the novel, even though it would be difficult for them to read. In order to make the book more accessible to his basic English class, he divided the class into small groups, making each group responsible for two chapters in the novel.

As each group read their assigned chapters, they kept a record of difficult vocabulary, reviewing the words in small group discussions, trying to understand the words' meanings by contextual clues, and using classroom dictionaries when all else failed.

Each group presented the plot of its chapters to the whole class, tying the story together, thus completing the jigsaw puzzle. Each group did a close reading and character analysis of their assigned chapters by reading carefully with an eye for potential scenes to script and film. After selecting these scenes, each group wrote scripts, including stage directions and dialogue, and enacted the scenes before a video camera. These scenes were later shown to the whole class.

In this particular assignment, while participating in jigsawing group work, the students were using a variety of language skills. They were using the four language acts—reading, speaking, listening, and writing—in a real situation and integrating them in a natural way. In addition, on their own they were making decisions, important language decisions, constructing meaning out of the novel as they read, discussed, scripted, and performed their scenes.

**Conclusion**

Both of these whole language classroom examples have put the student at the center of the learning process. The students were given the opportunity to use language in a variety of ways as they explained ideas and shared their thoughts with each other. The teacher got out of the way and let the students learn by interacting with each other. As some have noted, the teacher in a whole language classroom "leads from behind."

A whole language classroom teaches talking, but students do the majority of the talking, exploring possibilities, offering opinions, sharing ideas, asking questions in large groups, small groups, and partnerships.

A whole language classroom teaches reading. The teacher allows time for in-class reading, and students have some choice in the reading assignments. Reading is presented as an interactive process wherein the reader constantly creates and interprets the text. Opportunities are provided for nonassigned reading.

A whole language classroom teaches writing. Students have opportunities to select their own topics and write voluntarily. Time is allotted for a process approach to writing where writing is done for a variety of audiences and purposes, including writing to learn.

A whole language classroom teaches listening, but not passive listening to the teacher speaking. Students are encouraged to listen actively to each other and to their teacher.

A whole language student-centered classroom may be scary and new for the students as well as the teacher, but it works. Students are active learners, engaged in taking responsibility for their own learning. Their teachers take a coaching role, serving as facilitators and resource persons, modeling learning behavior, providing experiences in which students can interact and construct knowledge. Teachers need to trust their students and to trust themselves.

## WHOLE LANGUAGE: MOVING TO A WHOLE NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

by Bill Newby
Shaker Heights Senior High School, Ohio

Many years ago, my wife and I moved from one suburb of Cleveland to another, from one home to another about four miles away, and on several occasions when returning home from downtown, I found myself headed toward the wrong house.

I can still recall listening to the radio, thinking about the day ahead, and moving with the flow of traffic as I drove along Carnegie Avenue. Passing a florist shop, noticing the last of the Cleveland Clinic buildings, and going through the intersection at 105th, I knew it was time to move into the right-hand lane, so that I could make the turn at 107th and go up Fairhill. With comfort and confidence, I did just that, only to discover that I was once again on the wrong road.

"Whole language" has come to represent many things to me—so many, in fact, that they would be hard to easily summarize for me or someone else. But at the heart of it all, more essential than any of the many facets, the whole language movement is about moving to new neighborhoods and turning off our misguiding autopilots.

Of course, most whole language realtors clearly prefer certain neighborhoods over others, and their blatant biases may offend some. But the most compelling reason for secondary teachers to involve themselves in the whole language movement is not because they should succumb to any sales pitch; rather, it is because whole language's primary thrust and benefit is a clarification of purpose. Over and again, whole language challenges us to seriously reexamine our two most fundamental questions: *Where should we English teachers call home, and how can we get there?*

The map that whole language theorists would have us use to get our bearings is one provided by research conducted over the last thirty years in America, England, New Zealand, and Australia concerning the universal preschool acquisition of oral language—research which tends to suggest that the way children learn to speak is the way they learn all language processes.

But new maps are often difficult to read. One of the problems is that they do not seem trustworthy, especially if they fail to confirm our prejudices. Most of us approach our teaching with thoroughly ingrained pet theories which predispose us to persist in the face of failure (a seemingly enviable asset for any teacher), but these same predispositions cause us to disregard and devalue much that might inform and assist us.

Whole language asks us to shed our biases, to cast aside our textbook formulations, and to anchor ourselves in knowledge of the natural language learning processes of all students, in the powerful role that modeling, practice, and progressive approximation play in the development of language, and in the lessons that can be gained from "kid-watching"—observing our students.

But even if we make these steps, backsliding seems unavoidable. Even after weeks of success, I have often found myself reverting to some old, inherently flawed and frustrating teaching strategy. I have regressed to familiar neighborhoods, and I am trying to mow the lawn at my old address. Old habits die hard.

**Fragments of the Whole**

As I noted above, the whole language movement is definitely biased—in favor of acknowledging, reaffirming, and enhancing natural learning. Whole language theory rests on the foundation of natural learning as manifested outside of classrooms, and whole language theorists would have classroom teachers take their direction from these nonclassroom examples. And, I will add, this message is relevant for all—elementary, secondary, and even college teachers.

For example, consider the following principles from the whole language doctrine—principles that I have found repeatedly reorienting:

1. Whole language acknowledges the holistic nature of linguistic experience. Dorothy Watson states, "Whole language means that all systems of language are involved in any literary encounter" ("Reflections on Whole Language: Past, Present and Potential," *Oregon English* 11, no. 1 [1988]: 4). Humans naturally approach any problem (and pleasure) with all of the tools at their disposal, and a multiplicity of available tools are used in an interactive and complementary fashion.

   Instruction which inherently acknowledges and encourages complex, multifaceted language interactions more closely replicates natural literary encounters and enables these encounters to reach a more sophisticated level.
2. Similarly, whole language acknowledges the holistic nature of each student. We cannot come to a text without our personal prejudices, nor can we respond fully and naturally if we are arbitrarily confined to a narrow range of human experience. Complete literary encounters occur at both an emotional and intellectual level, simultaneously touching us personally and generally, and eliciting our understanding, wonder, doubt, delight, speculation, and imagination. Furthermore, whole language theorists tend to rely upon the intrinsic human drive toward meaning and power. Relying upon this inherent quality of the students (rather than viewing them as deficient or vacuous) should dramatically alter the interactions we have with them.
3. Whole language theorists place special emphasis upon the critical role of modeling, as universally manifested in the linguistic interactions between mother and child. For example, in *The Foundations of Literacy*, Don Holdaway notes the powerful role that adult models play in setting the norm and the direction toward which children strive (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1979).

Students need models; learning is facilitated by demonstrations. Teachers, therefore, who model literacy—who read and write, who question and revise, who strive for meaning and clarity, who wonder and create, who demonstrate the intellectual, political, bureaucratic and artistic uses of language—are more likely to be successful in further developing the literacy of their students. Modeling, Modeling, Modeling!

**Planning the Debutantes' Ball**

Secondary teachers can be introduced to whole language as any other core issue. Beginning an exploration of whole language does not require the invention of any unique process; all of the traditional professional development techniques apply—informal discussion, professional literature, speakers, workshops, conferences, summer institutes.

However, should you be fortunate enough to find yourself in a district where initial exploration leads to greater interest, whole language presents some significant idiosyncratic challenges deserving of special attention. Whole language theory tends to challenge teachers to make radical changes. Therefore, one should consider the dynamics of radical challenge and the prospective change that might ensue.

Though Shaker Heights High School is still in the early stages of this exploration and I cannot reflect on any finished or even fully matured process, I believe the most critical components of this process are open invitation, individualized pacing, and institutional support.

Whole language can be inherently threatening to even the best, most effective teachers. It should not, therefore, be forced upon them. Requiring teachers to attend whole language presentations might do more damage than good. It could elicit anxiety and defensive rigidity—neither of which provides a suitable groundwork for honest self-examination. The process ought to be voluntary.

Furthermore, one should never forget that teachers (like other humans) differ in the pace at which they can comfortably change, even those who may find whole language theory and practice intriguing and even applicable to their own teaching. Some people seem capable of changing overnight; others require years. Allowance should be made, therefore, for individualized pacing of change, and it would be foolhardy to think that any abbreviated whole language experience would have any significant impact on a group of teachers. Such an approach would only reach a small handful.

Finally, those who are ready to change must be provided a range of institutional support.

First, teachers need to know that risk taking will not be punished. All those who want to change need to experiment. They cannot be expected to know what will work until they try it. Rather, they need to know that their experimentations are being understood and appreciated as experiments. And if these experiments fail, they should be praised nonetheless.

Second, steps should be taken to network the experimenters. Though this could be done through formal teams and meetings, I am inclined to believe that informal networks are more potent and timely. An atmosphere of open sharing should prevail. Everyone should be encouraged to show and to tell, to brag and to borrow. Within such an atmosphere, the quick stimulate the sluggish, the successful inspire the defeated, and the isolated may connect with the larger enterprise.

Third, the institution must lend support to teachers in the process of change through a coordinated effort to reeducate parents. Parents usually seek from schools the best of what they experienced when they were in school. This is, of course, a reasonable expectation, but it is counterproductive if, in the interim since the parents completed their own schooling, viable research has revealed a better approach to teaching and learning. To

rephrase an old saw: if your teachers are not practicing what parents would most likely preach, then it is time to start preaching what your teachers are practicing. In the long run, informed parents are more likely than not to support our efforts.

**A Year's Snapshots**

Shaker Heights High School's English Department formally entered the whole language arena about one year ago. We did this with a day-long, mid-October workshop (1989) led by Regie Routman, a teacher in our district and author of *Transitions: From Literature to Literacy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988), and Ed Scutt, a high school teacher from a suburb in Rochester, New York. That initial exposure was followed by a few departmental meetings devoted to discussion of initial chapters of Tom Romano's *Clearing the Way: Working with Teenage Writers* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987); by several of our department attending the 1989 NCTE Annual Convention in Baltimore; by a portion of our department reading and discussing Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1987); by several of us joining ranks with elementary teachers at whole language support group meetings once every six weeks; by a couple of teachers attending a summer institute conducted by Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels, the authors of *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988); by a core of tenth-grade teachers meeting over the summer, in part to discuss applicability of reading and writing workshop approaches within their classrooms; by a second mid-October workshop (1990) led by Tom Romano; and by lots and lots of informal discussion, experimentation, and sharing within our ranks.

What did all of this activity lead to?

First, whole language has not been uniformly adopted or implemented within our school. Our department is composed of a superior corps of accomplished teachers with diverse talents and pedagogies. In varying degrees, we have all been exposed to whole language theory, and some have pursued it with much more enthusiasm and determination than others.

Furthermore, we have not abandoned our traditional curriculum. To the contrary, there continues to be a high degree of continuity between what we are now doing and what we have done in the past. But changes are occurring. Our whole language involvements over the past year have spawned or added momentum to the following changes within our building:

- more classroom libraries
- more self-selected reading
- more in-class reading
- dinner-table book reports
- more exposure to literature for its own effect (without didactic purpose or analytical follow-up)
- increased oral reading of literature
- more reader-response orientation to interpretation
- more frequent writing
- more weekly writing workshops
- more use of computers for writing
- wider spectrum of writing (including creative writing)
- increased use of journals, especially reading journals
- more writing with less imposed structure
- increased emphasis upon voice in writing
- diminished emphasis upon grammatical perfection
- more use of peer response and peer editing
- more collaborative learning projects
- more published student writing (newsletters, bulletin boards, classroom sharings, class books, hallway displays)
- more student input in evaluation
- more teachers writing when students write, reading when students read, completing assignments that they assign their own students

This list could go on, but enough is enough. The point is that the exposure to whole language has facilitated our growth, and it would seem that we are nowhere near being finished.

**Peak Experiments**

My personal exposure to whole language theory and practice has caused me to reflect at considerable length on my teaching, pointed me in the direction of some exciting possibilities, partially liberated me from some former pedagogical compulsions, and provided me (and, I would like to believe, my students) with some peak moments. Each was an experiment in teaching and learning.

**Creative Quizzing**

Over the years I have been in the habit of using reading quizzes to hold my students accountable for their assignments, and though the quizzes that I constructed occasionally featured some interpretative questions, the majority of the questions were factual. For example, during a reading of *The Scarlet Letter*, I might have asked my students, "How was Pearl treated by the other children of Boston?"

This year, instead of the above approach, I have experimented with creative quizzing. For example, after students had completed the sixth chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, I asked them to imagine that they were Pearl, returning home, entering the door of her house, and speaking to her mother. I added that I did not know what mood they as Pearl might be in or what they had to say to their mother, but I wanted them to imagine that moment and write what they would have said to their mother. My purpose in posing this question was to place students into the complex process of interpretation and speculation, forcing them to attempt to make sense out of what they had read and to apply that to an imaginary moment, challenging them to explore that situation from the perspective of and in the voice of a fictional character, Pearl.

One girl, a high school junior, responded as follows:

"Mother, your little Pearl is home. Today I went to school and it was fun. It was very fun. All of the kids were sitting in a circle and I was sitting high in a tree. I kept picking off the berries and throwing them at the kids. I hit every time. Even a couple kids got hit in the head. It hurt, because I heard them screaming. They didn't know where the berries were coming from. They didn't know it was me. I had fun. I hate those kids."

Not all of the responses were as outstanding, but it was more than clear to me who really understood the character and the book. This batch of "quizzes" was also much more interesting to read and gave me far greater insights into the quality of my students' responses to the novel than did my traditional quiz questions. Last, my students seemed to find the task engaging and demanding, more than I recall being associated with my traditional approach.

**Modeling Writing and Revision**

I write on a daily basis, and sometimes, like my students, I am writing "on assignment" or for publication. On several occasions, I have shared with my students my written drafts and the processes

I go through in producing a finished product. For example, I told them when I first had the idea for this article. Later, I showed them my rough draft. Subsequently, I shared a more extended edited draft because it complemented their bringing rough drafts to class, and I wanted to focus their attention on the various facets of revision. I have shared details with my students about how I write, where I write, how long it takes, and who I share my writings with. I let them hear my enthusiasm for the process, my delight in the creativity, and my doubts about being able to pull it all together.

On another occasion, I gave my students an in-class writing assignment and then wrote before them, directly onto an overhead transparency projected onto a screen. There were three options for this in-class essay, and I allowed them to decide which one I should attempt; and as I wrote they were able to not only see my initial composing, but also the various modifications and redirections my text took in the process of its evolution.

It is hard to fully know what the consequences of this type of sharing are, but my impression is that it makes writing and writing processes real for them and that it legitimizes my role as one available to help them become better writers.

**Demonstrating Peer Response and Editing**

Last year, one of my colleagues and I wanted to demonstrate peer response and editing. However, rather than using students for our subjects, we decided to use each other and to try to replicate what we were asking our students to do. Consequently, we arranged to visit each other's classrooms on the days when we wanted our students to engage in peer response, and we shared previously unseen pieces of writing, projected on an overhead screen, and invited each other to offer response and suggestion.

I am certain that students were able to see our tentativeness in confronting each other as well as to notice the different facets of each other's writing that we reacted to. We both felt that this experience helped establish a constructive frame and tone for the peer response and editing that our students eventually did.

**Shared Decisions**

My involvement with whole language has propelled me even further along the path of shared decision making, though I have always tried to involve my students in taking ownership of their own education. In some ways, I continue to be an arbitrary (hopefully beneficent) dictator. I still tend to assign homework, select major titles, and establish some long-term objectives entirely on my own. In other ways, however, I have made certain that students are in control of much of what we do together in the classroom.

For example, having told my creative writing students that we will have frequent sharing days to read and respond to each other's work, I now consult with them regularly to set a mutually agreeable next date. Similarly, about once a month I invite their evaluation of how well our class (and my teaching) has been supporting their growth as writers and their suggestions for improvement.

In my American literature class, students have influenced my decisions about critical homework dates, topics for many classroom discussions have been entirely based upon student choices, and four students appointed by their classmates have met with me to help plan and conduct a future class session. I even turned over to the class the decision about whether they would prefer traditional composition grading or a portfolio assessment model. (They unanimously opted for the latter.)

In all instances, shared decision making has heightened my awareness of my students' needs, has challenged them to make responsible, adult decisions, and seems to have contributed to their being invested in our mutual work. Consequently, I now have the sense that to some appreciable extent every student in my classroom is self-managing for constructive ends. It is a great feeling!

**Final Thoughts**

A fellow teacher and I were recently reflecting on how our exposure to whole language has affected our teaching. We teach very different groups of students, but our personal changes were identical. We both felt that whole language had helped us to be less neurotic, more observant, more constructively responsive, more reflective, and more creative. We still have "down" days and troublesome problems. But the "up" days are more frequent, and the work is more satisfying. Our students are learning slowly, but more and more of them seem to be learning. After all, isn't that what it's all about?

## STUDENT WRITERS SET THEIR OWN GOALS

by Sharon Wieland
Sacramento High School, California

For years I had done the kind of teaching that Donald Graves unflatteringly characterizes as "the teaching cycle that places young people on writer's welfare" ("Break the Welfare Cycle: Let Writers Choose Their Own Topics," *Forum*. P. Stock, ed. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1983, 98–101).

I enrolled my students on writer's welfare by assigning topics for them to write about, by determining when they would learn new techniques, skills, and kinds of writing, by asking them to write a piece once and hand it in to be graded (and it had better be good!), by editing everything they wrote in red ink, by deciding just how good the piece of writing was, and by serving as their sole audience. In fact, many teachers whom I knew taught the same way that I did. Our students never learned how to make those decisions for themselves, because we made every possible decision concerned with writing. Actually, our students felt that it was our duty as teachers to make those decisions for them.

But last September, as I began my twenty-third year of teaching, I made drastic changes in the way I taught my classes. The August before school started, I read Nancie Atwell's, *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1987), the story of how Atwell's seventh- and eighth-grade classes in Boothbay, Maine, choose their own writing topics, choose their own books to read, decide the next step to take in their writing activities, and set the long-range goals for their own reading and writing program.

This was the inspiration I had been looking for. I had been moving in that direction for years, asking my students to choose their own writing topics, respond helpfully to each others' writing, revise willingly, and publish responsibly. But one aspect of Atwell's program that I had never asked my students to do was to set their own long-range goals for writing. Although I felt that setting long-range goals was an important part of being an author—a role I knew students had to assume if they were ever to see themselves as real writers—I had made my students dependent on me by setting the long-range goals for the class (never mind whether or not the individuals within the class needed to work toward those goals). Therefore, I decided to ask my students to set their own long-range goals, encouraging them to get off writer's welfare.

**Getting Started**

For the first quarter I decided to set the initial goals for the students, goals that would introduce them to the whole process of

writing and get them started thinking as writers. I wanted them to find topics they cared about, to take risks by trying new techniques, topics, skills, and kinds of writing, to write drafts, to self-edit, to make decisions about what worked and what did not work in their pieces, to listen to and question other writer's pieces, and to give thoughtful, helpful responses. In other words I wanted them to begin making most of the decisions that real authors have to make and to make them within the context of a collaboratively operated classroom.

I can remember when I first started a few years ago, asking my students to accept writer responsibility. They were alarmed, confused, and belligerent. "Why don't you just give us something to write about?" "What do you want, anyway?" "I can't think of anything to write about." As time passed and they found out that they could make a writer's decisions, my students became protective of their writer's rights, not wanting to go back to the old way. They said, "Why can't we write on our own topics?" whenever I tried to assign "writing activities."

At the end of the first quarter, I began asking the students to set their own writing goals. I used an evaluation form to guide my discussions with the students as I conferenced with each one individually during silent reading and quiet writing class time. I began each conference for the first quarter with these questions:

1. What does a person have to do in order to be a good writer?
2. Which is your best piece of writing from this past quarter and what makes it best?
3. What are your goals as a writer for the next quarter? I wrote down the students' answers in the exact words that they gave, trying to be as accurate as possible. Later I asked my student assistant to copy the goals onto separate pieces of paper that I then gave to the students. Many of them attached this copy of their goals to the inside cover of their writing folders.

Some of my students began accepting much responsibility for their own writing by the end of the first quarter. When I asked them to set their own goals for the next quarter, however, some of them balked and wanted to keep receiving that kind of "welfare." Roger went to his teacher from the year before with his complaint: "I don't understand how she's grading. She wants *us* to say what we need to learn." Gayla approached the subject diplomatically during the first evaluation conference: "Could you just explain to me how you run the class?" And Hershel blurted out, as I was preparing to write down each student's writing plan for the day, "Why isn't this like a regular English class, anyway?" These students all had valid questions, deserving good answers, because they were asked by good students used to doing well in school. Because their teachers had always provided them with preestablished plans, it was natural that they would expect one now and would be confused when new rules changed the way they had always "played school."

My purpose in asking these kinds of questions of my students was to get them to think about their own writing from an evaluative stance so that they would have a basis for setting meaningful goals. I hoped that if they considered the activities involved in good writing while applying those standards to a particular piece of their own writing, they would be more likely to set relevant goals for the next quarter.

At the end of the second quarter I repeated the procedure, but I changed the conference questions. This time my evaluation form included two questions related to evaluation and two for setting new goals:

1. How do you feel about how well you accomplished your goals for this quarter?
2. What have you learned about reading and writing this quarter?
3. What are your goals for reading for the third quarter?
4. What are your goals for writing for the third quarter?

At this point I was more and more convinced about the desirability—no, the necessity—of students setting their own goals in both reading and writing if those activities were to be meaningful, relevant, and real for them. I hoped that the first question would cause the students to reflect on the goals that they had set for the second quarter so that their goals for the third quarter would contain implicit and explicit objectives that they would try to accomplish.

The students did set their own goals, and I was interested in, first, the kinds of goals they set at the end of the first quarter, compared with those set at the end of the second quarter by each student, wondering whether individuals would set different kinds of goals as time passed in their writing class. Second, I wanted to see if there was a change in the kinds of goals that were set in the class as a whole—did the writing class seem to have any effect on the kinds of goals they set?

### Are You a Writer?

In September I surveyed the students regarding reading and writing. One of the questions that I asked them about writing was, "Are you a writer?" I felt that this simple question would be quite revealing about the students' perceptions of writing and whether their idea of writing allowed them to see themselves as writers. As might be expected in a class such as this, a tenth-grade "advanced" English class, most of the students said, "yes," they were writers. No doubt their previous writing experiences had for the most part been successful, and they had probably done considerable amounts of writing in those years. In fact, only four of the students in this class answered, "no," when I asked them if they were writers. James, Jeni, Mai, and Julie formed, then, a small but interesting contrast to the rest of the class.

### The "No" Writers

Because I asked the students to set goals for themselves at the end of the first quarter and again at the end of the second quarter, I was curious to see if these "no" writers changed in the kinds of goals they set and if they changed their opinions as to whether they were writers. Jeni and Mai answered "no" again in February when I asked them if they considered themselves to be writers. Julie was absent and did not answer the question. James was the only one who changed his mind in February and said, "yes," he was a writer. I was particularly curious at that point to know what had caused him to begin seeing himself as a writer. I began by looking at the goals set by these four "no" writers at the end of the first quarter and at the end of the second quarter.

Julie's goal at the end of the first quarter was, "Write more that is interesting to me." Her goal at the end of the second quarter was, "Take my time to write well."

Jeni's goal at the end of the first quarter was "Improve; [write] different kinds of stories, shorter ones, more than one." Jeni did not answer the question for her goal at the end of the second quarter.

Mai said that her goal at the end of the first quarter was, "Write more than a short story; write a longer, imaginary story." Her goal at the end of the second quarter was, "Still write poems but try not to rhyme them; just put down what I feel about life." James, at the end of the first quarter, set a goal to "be more productive; [write] different types of stories." His goal at the end of the second quarter

was, "Work on one of the topics I didn't start or finish first semester."

James wrote in September that a good writer "needs to know what and how to put [his] thoughts on paper." In February he wrote that a good writer "needs to write clearly and [I] don't necessarily mean penmanship. Seeing my own writing, spelling shouldn't be put or held against a writer heavily. A good writer needs to keep the reader interested in his writing."

The main difference between James and the other three "no" writers was that James began to consider the needs of his readers while the other three continued to consider writing strictly from their viewpoints as the translators of ideas into written language. That is, James changed from "writer-based" to "reader-based" thinking, whereas the other three "no" writers remained strictly "writer-based" in their thinking.

Jeni said, "[A good writer] has to be critical of his own work; be open to the criticism of others and be willing to spend a lot of time on one piece of work." Mai said, "Practice. Write as much as you can. Learn the steps." Julie said, "The writer needs a good vocabulary and good form. They need a good knowledge of English."

I think that the main reason that James changed his answer to "yes" when I asked him if he was a writer was because of the success he had several times during the semester in reading aloud what he had written to others in the class, making people laugh with his crazy stories. He also spent a good part of his time collaboratively writing funny stories that he knew he would be reading aloud. This seemed to keep him going and ultimately was, I think, the primary factor changing his perception of himself as a writer.

**The "Yes" Writers**

The students who answered "yes" in September to the question, "Are you a writer?" did not change their minds as a result of our workshop-oriented class; they all still said "yes" in February. The goals set by individual "yes" writers are indicative of the kinds of goals set by the class as a whole. Some of the goals were global, suggesting overall improvements, such as Carol's goal to "write a good story," having written mostly poetry the previous quarter. Some of the goals were concerned with surface evidence of good writing, such as Tony's goal to "finish more long, grammatically correct pieces." Some of the goals dwelled on personal aspects of writing, such as Kevin's goal to "write more easily in my own style and don't abandon so many." A few of the goals were topic specific; Freddy set his goal at the end of the first quarter to finish a story he had begun, "The Chest," and revised the goal at the end of the second quarter, expressing it as "try to salvage 'The Chest'."

The most notable characteristic of the goals, however, is that they were completely individualized. Each student had designed goals to meet his or her specific needs at a particular point in his or her writing development. When I thought of how difficult that would have been for me, as their teacher, to accomplish, both in usefulness and in the time it would have taken to do it, I knew that I would have been inadequate for the job.

**Students Set Length as a Goal**

The most common goal that the students set both at the end of the first quarter and at the end of the second quarter was a goal related to the length of their writing. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that writing could be improved by making it longer. Like Kenny, who stated his goal as "Write more," many of the students made comments about wanting to increase the length of what they wrote:

"Write twice as much as first quarter."
"Finish my long stories."
"I'd like to finish a long interesting fantasy or adventure story."
"Write a long story."
"Do more writing at home."

The comments were repetitive as the students expressed the same idea over and over again—"Write more; Write more." Some of them wanted to write more often than they were, but most of them wanted simply more quantity of writing.

**Students Set Finishing as a Goal**

The comment that occurred second most often in the students' goals was a comment regarding finishing their work. Many of the students had trouble at first in completing a piece of writing because they had the freedom to abandon a piece of writing whenever they wished, and they could choose whatever they wanted to work on in their writing each day. It was easier sometimes to start something new than to wrestle with a piece that was not developing as they wanted. Many of the students soon came to realize that their folders were beginning to bulge with unfinished pieces of writing. Since I had given them an original goal at the beginning of the year of regularly finishing pieces of writing (though not all at the same time), they began to realize that the goal was harder to achieve on their own than it would have been if their teacher had set due dates for finished pieces. Like Nina who said her goal was to "Finish more," their comments indicated that they finally saw the goal as one of their own:

"Finish something."
"Finish all pieces started."
"Finish piece about the girl getting abducted by her father."
"Finish another fictional story."
"Finish stories—don't abandon for a new topic and then come back when the subject and topic is cold."
"Try to finish my list of topics."
"Finish some—start new ones."
"Finish detective story."
"Complete more."

Finishing was a difficult goal for many of the students to meet because they first had to see it as a personal goal related to specific pieces of writing before finishing took on meaning for them. When I set finishing as a goal for the first quarter, it did not have the same kind of power as when they set finishing as a goal for themselves.

**Students Set Time as a Goal**

When students realized that good writing takes time—a long amount of time—students began giving themselves time for writing, the long amount of time that good writing demands for completion. Many of the students commented that they had never realized before just how much time should be devoted to writing. Thus, they began setting goals that indicated that they would begin dedicating more time to pieces of writing. Occasionally, more time meant letting a piece of writing sit for awhile before returning to it. Freddy said his goal was to "Finish my unfinished stories." Previously, he and the other students felt that writing was often completed in one sitting. Now they began to see that papers from previous quarters could be returned to as viable pieces of writing. They echoed Kenny's goal of wanting "to add more to his Russia story":

"Continue with what I started this quarter and improve my skills."
"Go back to my poems."

### Students Set Trying New Techniques as a Goal

The students came up with a remarkable number of techniques they wanted to try in their writing, some related to the mini-lessons that I presented from time to time in class, and others related to what they saw their fellow students in the class doing in their writing. Some of the students also decided to set goals for themselves of trying out techniques and styles they saw other authors doing in books they had read. Their goals were filled with new techniques they wanted to try in their writing:

"Move away from reliance on memory; new techniques; increase vocabulary; rely on feelings, emotions, the present; try a picture story with quotations."

"Sound more mature."

"Try new styles and modes."

"Imaginative writing."

"Another poem; mysterious story."

"A fictional story with characters."

"Write about how something small can change perceptions."

"A 'love poem'; try not to make it sticky sweet."

"A love story."

"A horror story."

"A true short story."

"Write poems in different styles as seen in different authors."

"A biography."

"Fantasy."

"An opinion essay."

"Work on new style (person)."

"Try third person."

"Describe things better."

### Letting Students Set Their Own Goals

The students in my class were able to set their own long-range goals for writing. With my help in individual conferences, the students set goals that moved them forward in their writing development. Their goals were personal and functional because they were set within the context of each student's writing, and they were set when they were needed by the writers.

Other teachers might wish to let their students get off of writer's welfare, too. Letting the students set their own goals for writing is one way to help them toward independence in writing. Generally, the strategy for starting students setting their own long-range writing goals involves end-of-quarter evaluation and goal-setting conferences with each student. The first step for letting students set their own goals is to follow the teacher-set goals for first quarter with an evaluation conference held with each student, using a standard question sheet. The second step is to provide a structure for the use of the student-set goals. I suggest attaching the goals to the inside of each student's writing folder, using the goals in an evaluation conference at the end of first quarter, and allowing students to set goals for the second quarter. This procedure should be repeated at the end of each quarter, so that the students learn to use the ending quarter's goals to evaluate their own progress as they conference with their teacher at the end of that quarter. Then, they base their goals for the upcoming quarter on the needs they see and feel.

As the students evaluate their progress toward meeting their goals each quarter, the teacher, too, evaluates the students' progress. Since I must still assign a letter grade to my students four times a year on report cards, the grades that I now give my students are no longer based on how well the students met my generalized and somewhat vague goals for the whole class. Now I give grades based on how nearly the students met the goals that they set as we conferenced together and on how well the students have met personal, functional goals set within the contexts of their own writing, as they have gotten themselves off writer's welfare and assumed author authority.

## ASSESSMENT IN A WHOLE LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT: TEACHING STUDENTS TO DOCUMENT THEIR OWN WRITING PROGRESS

by Edgar H. Thompson
Emory and Henry College, Virginia

The increased popularity of the whole language approach to literacy has led teachers to expand their concept of assessment beyond testing to include more informal, holistic ways of documenting student progress and learning.

Maintaining an active file of students' writing samples (collected from time to time and occasionally analyzed) is one way teachers can document student progress in writing. However, I suggest an additional step. For every piece of writing my students do—whether journal entries or drafts of longer, more formal pieces of discourse—I ask my students to identify one thing they learned about writing as a result of doing that particular piece of writing. Students' observations are written each day during the beginning minutes of class. Each observation focuses on the last writing—whether formal or informal—that the students have done since the previous class meeting, and each observation is to be no longer than one sentence in length for each piece of writing completed. I would add one word of caution: these brief observations are not intended to take the place of longer self-evaluations that I have advocated elsewhere, ones students might be asked to do in relation to more formal papers ("Self-Assessment and the Mastery of Writing," *Testing in the English Language Arts: Uses and Abuses*. John D. Beard and Scott E. McNabb, eds. Rochester, MI: MCTE, 1985).

The following sample one-sentence observations were collected from a group of good writers on the Monday after a holiday break:

"I learned today that when I have a lot of things on my mind, my writing is less than adequate."

"When you keep daily journals, you reflect on what you've written in your journal in the past."

"Sometimes I have to sit down and make a list about things that are on my mind before I write, or I forget them during the writing."

"In writing today I learned that coming up with rhyming words is hard to do."

Not all observations will be equally perceptive, but many will be with practice.

### Guidelines for the Observations

The students' observations can be guided by a checklist of items such as a hierarchical list addressing global concerns—unity, focus, coherence—as well as lower level concerns such as paragraph structure, sentence structure, and various surface features, one modeled on the list developed by Carl Koch and James Brazil (*Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978, 103–104). Another possibility is that students develop their own checklists, either individually or collaboratively, and these lists can be revised by students and teachers together as the need arises. Or students can be guided in their self-analysis by the features of good writing, including voice, movement, and several technical skills, identified by Dan Kirby, Tom Liner, and Ruth Vinz (*Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*. 2nd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988, 110). Final-

ly, writers may address matters of content, that is, what they discovered about a particular subject during their writing that had not occurred to them previously.

I ask my students to keep whatever observations they make in a separate notebook for easy reference. I prefer a chronological listing of the records, where each writing session's self-evaluative statement is dated and follows the previous one, since patterns are easier to identify that way. Another approach is to use writing folders, where each side of a manilla file folder is used to record different information about the writing process, a suggestion proposed by Donald Graves (*Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983). A third approach is to store all of the information on a single diskette. Students and teachers can then print a copy whenever they wish, and teachers can create computer programs that allow ordering and analysis of this data for classroom-based research.

**Advantages**

There are several advantages to recording observations using the approaches I have just described. Students and teachers (and anyone else who is interested) will not get an accurate picture of what a writer is capable of producing if only one piece of writing is looked at; any writer can look like a buffoon on any given day. For instance, a student who was not happy with his writing on one particular day wrote, "Today, I learned that I couldn't write in a straight line if my life depended on it." To make a judgment about this student's writing ability based on this one sample would be both unfair and inaccurate.

On the other hand, an examination of writing samples collected over a period of time can be cumbersome and time-consuming. Yet, if students and teachers examine the kind of cumulative lists I have proposed—which, remember, are referenced to each piece of writing—then the list items will expose writing patterns more quickly. Even if some students get stuck in a rut and repeatedly identify only certain kinds of learning, for example, "I learned to spell. . . ," once their teacher discovers this is what they are doing, then their teacher is in a position to nudge, not force, them to consider other issues.

Teachers can ask students to examine their own lists from time to time, looking for patterns in their own work, and then ask them to write informal papers analyzing their own progress. Both teachers and students can retrieve from students' writing folders those specific pieces of writing that illustrate some particular feature. Such metacognitive activities not only help students learn to claim the good things that are happening in their writing but also to reinforce analytic, synthetic thinking. The type of documentation I recommend gives a better sense of a student's progress in learning to anyone who examines the lists and the patterns they reveal, in much the same manner as the advantages of using reader-response writings over traditional testing are described by Judy Grumbacher ("Writing to Understand in Science," *Plain Talk*. Judy Self, ed. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education, 1987).

Teachers may accomplish many good things by asking their students to keep this kind of record. First, it teaches students a way to take responsibility for their own learning. Second, it encourages students to take the kind of objective stance in relation to their own writing believed essential to students' acquisition of mastery over their own writing by Lev Vygotsky (*Thought and Language*. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar, trans. and ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962). Finally, students can and should maintain this documentation themselves; documentation of this kind does not require a large amount of their teacher's time.

"Testing has become the ubiquitous solution to winning public trust and gaining financial support," and "schools [are pressured to] become more accountable to prove themselves effective," warns Marlene Corbett in "The Testing Dilemma" (*SLATE Starter Sheet*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989). The cumulative, chronological listings I recommend, along with the collections of writing samples, serve as a method of gathering information about student writing progress that both amplifies rather than reduces information and brings "out the links between emerging skill and the foundations of literacy," as advocated by Edward Chittenden and Rosalea Courtney ("Assessment of Young Children's Reading: Documentation as an Alternative to Testing," *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write*. Dorothy Strickland and Lesley Mandel Morrow, eds. Newark, DE: IRA, 1989, 117). Such assessment is more in line with the tenets of the whole language approach and perhaps over time will convince a few more people that there are better ways to "assess," not test, students' writing.

## RETURNING VOCABULARY TO CONTEXT

by Carol Jago
Santa Monica High School, California

Some students love vocabulary work and blithely defend it as an easy way to keep up their average. Easy for some.

I know many good teachers who say to themselves, "I have to teach vocabulary. I have to prepare my students for the SAT exams." Yet, we are, after all, teachers of language and literature, not crammers for an exam. We must not let ourselves be driven by a test.

Vocabulary study wastes time on a counterproductive activity, one that is culturally biased as well.

**Vocabulary Study as a Counterproductive Activity**

Teaching vocabulary words in isolation from standard lists is a waste of time because students memorize the vocabulary definitions for a quiz on Friday, then quickly forget that list to make room for the next week's quiz. When the big test comes, students re-memorize, only to forget.

The students who consistently perform well on the vocabulary portion of standardized tests are readers. A voracious reader is more likely to have a large vocabulary, is more likely to comprehend well, and is more likely to write well—three predictors of success in college. Lists of memorized words will not help students get admitted into college or perform well in college nearly as much as wide reading and discussion will.

We want to educate our students so that they will be capable, confident readers of text, but we could never assign, teach, and quiz them enough to insure that they will never stumble upon an unfamiliar word. What we need to be doing is helping students develop and refine strategies for learning words in context, and then we need to show them how to apply these strategies to text, lots of text.

Of course we should teach students about words, but vocabulary should be taught within a meaningful context. In vocabulary programs the authors of the programs create what to them are "systematic" lists. For the student, however, such instruction is fragmentary and decontextualized. It is hard to learn something that does not make sense, and arbitrary lists of similar words make no sense to sixteen-year-olds. In addition, vocabulary testing can create a situation that is harmful to some students.

**Vocabulary Study as a Culturally Biased Activity**

A student from a middle-class home typically looks at a list of 20 "new" vocabulary words from her teacher and already knows 10. If she pays attention in class, she will pick up a few more and get a C on the quiz; if she studies, she will get an A or B. Meanwhile, a second language student or one who does not come from a print-rich home will come to the list not knowing a single word. If she studies hard, she may learn 10 new words; however, unlike her classmate who also learned 10 new words, she will receive a D. Vocabulary study of isolated words out of context tells this student once again that she is stupid, that she cannot make it in the academic world, and that she will never catch up to her classmates. Did we need one more test score to tell us this? Did she need more proof of where she stands? (No wonder she cuts classes on Friday.)

If we eliminated all vocabulary drill from our curriculum, there might be time for the reading and study of several more books in any given school year. We might be able to have students write more and talk more about their writing, their own use of words. Our lesson plans will not be as tidy and neither will our grade books, but then we really did not need those vocabulary scores to tell us that white, middle-class children do better in school than other children. If a student does not come from a literate background, that is all the more reason why we must provide a user-friendly environment for words in our classrooms. Unless our goal is keeping children in their class-defined places, our lesson plans should work to create a print-rich fifty-minutes for our students, a time when words are discussed, debated, and used with joy.

# Software Review

## SEEN: TUTORIALS FOR CRITICAL READING

by Wendy Paterson
Buffalo State College, New York

While teachers of writing have found the computer to be an invaluable tool for mediated writing, teachers of reading have almost given up on the search for software that does more than present isolated skill drills.

Helen Schwartz, a name English instructors should recognize for her research in computer-mediated writing, has created an excellent reading/writing software package called SEEN: Tutorials for Critical Reading (available from Conduit software publishers). In her own words, "SEEN helps students to analyze and interpret their [reading] assignments. The software has two major components: six tutorials, each tailored to a specific task, such as analysis of an essay or a character in literature; and six accompanying bulletin boards where students can comment on the work of their peers and receive comments on their own work."

Reading researchers emphasize the need to allow students to interact with the text and to monitor comprehension. We improve our reading, as we do with writing, through reading and responding to that reading. Software in literacy too often emphasizes analysis and does little to allow the student to synthesize. The best way to monitor comprehension and determine whether the student is processing information accurately is to ask the student to do some writing in association with his/her reading.

The exercises in SEEN ask the students questions, encouraging them to develop ideas appropriate for character analysis, plotting in literature, essay analysis, exploratory essays, art exploration, and historical conflicts. A necessary precedent to working with this package, of course, is an assigned reading. Readings are not included in the package, making it even more useful to both reading and writing teachers. When a teacher assigns a reading, one that fits any of the above categories, the student using SEEN will be guided to a logical and well-developed analysis of the reading with a resultant essay that may be written alone or in electronic dialogue with other students or the instructor. SEEN works with a variety of word processors to allow the student to work with material generated in the program. The advantages of computer-assisted instruction—individualized attention, patience, infinite revision, repetition, and structure—also work well with this type of computer-mediated reading experience. The only drawback to this program is management of the bulletin board exchanges. With a program this large and expansive, management is not as easy as single-disk management, but it is not insurmountable. The program should not be used independent of supervision; it is not a "plug-in and run" type of tutorial. Teaching time is necessary, but minimal.

I am encouraged by the design and function of this program as it is consistent with the teaching of reading and writing as integral parts of each other.

## *QUARTERLY* "BEST ARTICLE" AWARD

The Conference on English Leadership (CEL), formerly the Conference for Secondary School English Department Chairpersons (CSSEDC), announced the recipient and runners-up of its 1990 "Best Article" award for articles published in the *CSSEDC Quarterly* during 1989. The award honors the author of the best article published in 1989, so chosen because of its value to the department chair, the quality of its writing, and the originality of what it said.

Dr. Collin T. Wansor, chairperson of the English department of Hempfield Area Senior High School in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, won the award for the lead article in the December 1989 *Quarterly* issue devoted to teacher research, "Research in the English Classroom: Taking a First Step." A graduate of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, "Terry" Wansor describes qualitative research, a type of research used in his doctoral studies, hoping to encourage colleagues to try it in their own departments.

Wansor was presented with a plaque at the NCTE Annual Convention in Atlanta during the Secondary Section Luncheon.

Honorable mention for the award went to Carole Ackerson Bertisch, of Rye Neck Middle and Senior High School, New York, for "A Researcher Observes a Writing and Reading Community," published in the December 1989 teacher research issue, and Ken Mitchell, of Nyack Junior and Senior High School, New York, for "Professional Study Groups: Collegiality for the Improvement of Instruction," published in the February 1989 professional development issue.

The judging committee included Sue Benjamin, Highland Park High School, Illinois; Kevin McHugh, Finneytown Junior/Senior High School, Cincinnati, Ohio; Anne Picone, North Hills High School, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Don Stephen, Sidney High School, Ohio.

# Announcements

## NCTE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ADVOCATES LOWER CLASS SIZE LIMITS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

The Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of English has approved a policy urging the adoption of lower class

size limits for the teaching of secondary school English. Through this action, NCTE now advocates class sizes of "not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers." This is a downward revision of the Council's 1962 policy, which called for each English language arts teacher to have direct instructional responsibility for no more than 100 students in no more than four classes per day.

Members of NCTE's Secondary Section Steering Committee, who proposed the new policy, said it is impossible to fulfill today's higher expectations for teaching and learning the language when their teachers' daily workloads exceed 80 students.

"The typical secondary teacher has 150 students each day," responded Miles Myers, executive director of NCTE. "If each student were given 10 minutes of individual attention each week—conferencing with a student on an essay, discussing readings with the student, reviewing test results—then the typical secondary teacher's work week would increase by 25 hours. In other words, if students are to get the attention they need, then the student load assigned to teachers must be reduced."

The Board of Directors action commits NCTE to encourage school districts and states to find ways to reduce class sizes to levels that enable teachers to use [such] methods to develop higher-level language and thinking abilities.

The new NCTE policy was prepared by a subcommittee headed by its newly elected chair, Jackie E. Swensson, of Meritt Hutton Junior High School, Thornton, Colorado. It reads as follows:

"**WHEREAS:** In its 1962 Resolution on Class Size and Teacher Workload in Secondary Schools, the National Council of Teachers of English pronounced its conviction that the teacher of English should have direct instructional responsibility for no more than 100 students in no more than four classes per day;

"**WHEREAS:** A rapidly expanding body of research and theory makes it clear that the past recommendations from NCTE are inadequate to fulfill current expectations and recommendations for effective language arts instruction and to develop the increasing levels of literacy demanded in an information-based society;

"**WHEREAS:** In response to changing expectation and methods for effective English language arts instruction, the landmark English Coalition Conference held in 1987 recommended 'the normal teaching load for teachers of English as four classes of twenty students';

**Resolution**

"**THEREFORE:** be it resolved that NCTE official policy recommend class sizes of not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers.

"Further be it resolved that NCTE develop a program to encourage schools, districts, and states to adopt plans and to implement activities resulting in class sizes of not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers by the year 2000.

"Further be it resolved that NCTE undertake activities to introduce legislation that requires school districts applying for categorical funds to have a plan to reduce class size and teacher workload for English language arts classes to reflect the official NCTE policy."

Serving with Swensson on the Secondary Section Class Size Subcommittee were Karolyn Burkett, Newark High School, Ohio; Carol Compton, Hudson High School, Massachusetts; Richard W. Luckert, Olathe School District, Kansas; and outgoing Secondary Section Chair Faith Z. Schullstrom, Guilderland Central School District, New York.

For a free single copy of "Lost in the Crowd," a brochure that discusses the 1990 class size policy (available around March 1, 1991), send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request to Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

## NCTE PLANS NEW SUMMER INSTITUTE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH

A new Summer Institute for Teachers of Secondary School English has been added to the 1991 calendar of professional development activities of the National Council of Teachers of English. Sponsored by NCTE's Secondary Section, it is set for Tuesday, July 16, through Sunday, July 21, at San Francisco State University.

"A Changing World: The Changing English Class" will be the theme for the institute. Sessions will focus on changes in content, pedagogy, and expectations for learning required for teaching an increasingly diverse student population in a changing society. The institute begins with an evening reception July 16. Each day opens with a writing session, followed by a general session and team activities.

Teams of participants will design projects defining their concepts of teaching and learning English in the future, describe changes needed in their own classrooms, participate in activities such as cooperative learning that can prove useful for their own teaching, consider alternative forms of student and teacher assessment, exchange ideas, and form links with other participants in similar teaching roles.

Program chair for the institute is Ken Holmes of Lincoln Senior High School, East St. Louis, Illinois. General session speakers are as follows:

Wednesday, July 17: Tom Romano, high school teacher, University of New Hampshire doctoral student, and author of *Clearing the Way: Working with Teenage Writers*. His topic is "Improving Writing."

Thursday, July 18: Janet Nagy, teacher at Parkway South High School, Manchester, Missouri, and chair of a committee promoting international concepts across disciplines in that school, discussing curriculum reorganization. Her topic: "Beyond Isolation."

Friday, July 19: John Brousseau, English department chair at Walden III Junior/Senior High School, Racine, Wisconsin, and facilitator of Right of Passage Experience, a Walden III senior requirement taking the place of locally required standardized tests. He will discuss "Graduation by Demonstration: The Right of Passage Experience."

Saturday, July 20: Bonnie Davis, award-winning English teacher in the Mehlville School District and in colleges in the St. Louis area, who has developed curriculum materials on the black experience and black history. She will speak on "The Changing Paradigms of Literature."

Team leaders for the institute include Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer of Clark High School, San Antonio, Texas (the only teacher serving on the U.S. Education Department's study panel to recommend improvements in the department's measures of quality in education); Gwen Alexander, veteran teacher in the District of Columbia Public Schools and an Advisory Board member for the National Writing Project; Susan Burke, teaching supervisor for language arts, Farnsworth Middle School, Guilder-

continued on page 16

**CALL FOR PROPOSALS**
**Conference on English Leadership**

**Seattle, Washington**
**November 24–27, 1991**

**Theme: "LEADERSHIP FOR THE '90s"**

**Conference Chair: Celestine Lyght-James**

Name _____

Position _____

School address _____

_____

phone (  ) _____ – _____

Home address _____

_____

phone (  ) _____ – _____

Title of proposed session _____

Audience ____ Elementary ____ Middle School ____ High School ____ College

Presenter(s) _____

_____

Chair _____

Allotted time: ____ 1 hr ____ 2 hr ____ other

Essential audiovisual aids/equipment _____

☐ Will bring ☐ Needs to be supplied

**BRIEF SUMMARY/DESCRIPTION**

Include objectives and possible outcome (no more than 3 paragraphs).

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

**GENERAL GUIDELINES**

1. As a professional, nonprofit association, CEL will be unable to reimburse program participants for travel and living expenses.
2. Proposals should be submitted no later than February 28, 1991 (preferably well before this date).
3. Mail proposals to: Celestine Lyght-James, 1991 CEL Conference Chair, 7520 Society Drive, Thomas West House, Claymont, Delaware 19702
4. Notice of action on proposals will be sent before May 1991.

The program chair seeks the names of persons who are likely to attend the conference who might serve as session chairs. Please list names and addresses of persons who might serve in that capacity.

_____

_____

_____

If further information is needed, you may call the conference chair at 302/454-2381 (wk) or 302/791-0552 (hm).

land, New York, and researcher for the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature; Kyoko Sato, director, Adopt-a-Teacher Program, California State University, Northridge.

Also, former secondary school English teacher Elizabeth D. Nelms, now a sixth-grade teacher in the laboratory school of the University of Florida, Gainesville; Candy Carter, teacher of English at Tahoe Truckee High School and former editor of *California English*; and Ed Cunningham, English teacher at San Rafael High School, California, who participated in designing and managing NEXUS, an interdisciplinary school-within-a-school for juniors and seniors.

Institute enrollment is limited to 200 persons. The fee of $530 for NCTE members, $565 for nonmembers, includes tuition and materials, lodging in residence halls for five nights (shared room), breakfast and lunch each day plus two dinners, a barbecue, and reception refreshments. The San Francisco State University campus is in southwestern San Francisco near Lake Merced and the Pacific Ocean.

For further information and registration materials for the Summer Institute for Teachers of Secondary School English, write to Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS— PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership, seeks articles of 500–5,000 words on topics of interest to English department leaders. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, problems for rural schools, reading/writing centers, and whole language curriculum. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In addition, upcoming issues will have these themes:

October 1991 (July 1 deadline):
**The Changing Literature Class**

December 1991 (September 15 deadline):
**Testing/Assessing/Measuring Student Performance**

February 1992 (November 1 deadline):
**Reading and Writing Connections**

May 1992 (February 1 deadline):
**The Tracking/Grouping Issue**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced, typed copy.

Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326.


### CEL Executive Committee

**Chair**
Myles Eley
Warren Central High School
9500 East 16th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46229

**Associate Chair**
Paul C. Bellin
Weld County School District #6
811 15th Street
Greeley, CO 80631

**Past Chair**
Wendell Schwartz
Stevenson High School
1670 West Highway 22
Prairie View, IL 60069

**Liaison to NCTE Secondary Section Committee**
Mary Sue Gardetto
Ankeney Junior High School
4085 Shakertown Road
Beavercreek, OH 45430

**Corresponding Secretary**
Susan Hayles-Berbower
Huntington Beach UHSD
10251 Yorktown Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

**Membership Chair**
Mary Ellen Thornton
Patrick Henry Middle School
Houston, TX 77093

**Secretary-Treasurer/ Staff Liaison**
Miles Myers
NCTE

**Members-at-Large**
Susan Benjamin
Highland Park High School
433 Vine
Highland Park, IL 60035

Kristina M. Elias
West Hartford Public Schools
West Hartford, CT 06117

Thomas Fischer
Lyons Township High School
100 S. Brainard Avenue
LaGrange, IL 60525

Ira Hayes
Syosset High School
South Woods Road
Syosset, NY 11791

Daniel A. Heller
Brattleboro Union High School
Brattleboro, VT 05301

Deborah Smith McCullar
Dean Morgan Junior High School
1440 S. Elm
Casper, WY 82601



**ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY**
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
Champaign, Illinois
Permit No. 85


BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*Leadership for Excellence*

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

**Conference on English Leadership**
**(formerly: Conference for Secondary School English Department Chairpersons)**

Volume 13, Number 2
May 1991
Editor: James Strickland

## In This Issue

### LEARNING LABELS

by James Strickland, editor

I do not believe in labels. They may be fine for laundering instructions on new clothes, but labels tend to obscure more than they reveal. Take dyslexia, for example.

I do not believe in the explanation that dyslexia is a perceptual or visual problem. I know thousands of people do. I know that people I work with claim to be dyslexic. I know that a very prestigious organization exists to promote treatments for the illness, an organization whose very existence therefore requires a belief that dyslexia exists. By way of analogy, I do not believe in UFOs, although thousands of people do, although people on television claim to have been aboard them, and although prestigious organizations are dedicated to establishing communication with them. I guess that is the trouble with belief systems. The thousands who already believe in mysterious things will not believe my contradiction or that of notable authorities such as Frank Smith (on dyslexia) or Carl Sagan (on UFOs).

I do believe that those who have been labeled (and the actual label does not matter) have real and serious problems, but to say that they cannot learn because they have a learning disability is not really saying anything at all. For example, dyslexia is a diagnosis used to label those who have had difficulty reading. Once the label is attached, it then becomes the cause for their difficulties, and efforts are made to cure the patient of the illness.

Labels tend to spread their scope to include almost anything. Even though dyslexia refers to an unexplained difficulty in reading, I have heard it used to describe just about any reading problem. Labels also allow us to do things to those so-labeled that we would not do to the normal population (like drills-for-skills approaches we know do not work). Labels allow us to treat people in ways that are different from the normal population (like putting them in less challenging situations and expecting less of them) and hire someone else to handle those who do not learn in spite of the way we teach (as most students actually do).

The first article by Neil Cosgrove, a colleague at Slippery Rock University, warns us of the dangers inherent in accepting essentially psychological or biological labels for language acts. To accept such labels for children's difficulties in school is to accept a neurological, biological, and behavioral explanation for how language is acquired and used. Sharon Wieland, a frequent contributor from the Sacramento City Unified School District in California, shows what happens when we ignore the labels and let the "skills kids," as they are called at her school, read real literature.

Carole Bencich, a former high school teacher, now an assistant professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, challenges the wisdom of tracking as a method of creating homogeneous groups. To place children in a track is to rob them of the richness that comes with divergence in thought and "the shared construction of meaning which can result from multiple interpretations, varied backgrounds, and expanded linguistic codes."

Deborah Wells, an assistant professor of education at Slippery Rock University, illustrates Bencich's point with the story of Flor,

(continued on page 2)

**Inside . . .** **page number**

**Unmasking Psycho/Biological Labels for Language Acts** . . . . . 2
by Cornelius Cosgrove
**"Skills Kids" and Real Literature** . . . . . 5
by Sharon Wieland
**Tracking or Sidetracking?** . . . . . 7
by Carole Bencich
**Flor: A Learning Disabled Child in a Whole Language Classroom** . . . . . 8
by Deborah Wells
**Room to Talk: Opening Possibilities with the "At-Risk"** . . . . . 10
by Suzanne Miller
**Do You Teach LEPs or REAL Students?** . . . . . 11
by Darlynn Fink
**A Silent Calling: Why I Chose This Career** . . . . . 12
by Ron Goba
**Software Review: "Do It Yourself"** . . . . . 13
by Wendy Paterson
**Book Review: *Learning Denied* by Denny Taylor** . . . 13
by Kathleen Strickland
**Reviews in Brief** . . . . . 14
**Call for Manuscripts** . . . . . 16

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

a student labeled as learning disabled, who benefits from and adds to the richness of an integrated whole language classroom.

Suzanne Miller, a former secondary English teacher for eighteen years and department coordinator for ten of those years, now at the State University of New York at Albany, explores the importance of conversation as a method of reaching the students some label as "at-risk." She shares her observations as a participant observer in an "at-risk" classroom, and she lets the students of Laura J. sing her praise.

Darlynn Fink, the director of First Year English at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, poses an unusual question, "Do you teach LEPs or REAL students?" Fink shares with us the variety of acronyms we have devised to label students whose first language is not English, and she tells us how her students feel about such labels.

In this issue, many authors express the view that all students are capable but that they learn at different rates in different ways and for different reasons. However, due to the political structure of what we call education, and due to a misguided belief that labeling students provides them with the "help they need," many teachers are caught in a system that puts up barriers that actually hold the children back.

The next article is written by a teacher who does not believe in barriers. He knows kids are all different, and he realizes some tasks are painfully difficult. Fortunately, he has spent his career believing in students and helping students believe in themselves. In thinking about his career, Ron Goba, the department chair of English K–12 at Hingham Public Schools in Massachusetts, looks back and remembers one student—a boy with a stutter, a boy whose disability could have defeated him if he had accepted the label as the limit of his ability. He did not, and his struggle mirrors the struggle of all who go beyond their present limits. Goba celebrates this boy in a prose-poem essay whose form is somewhat unusual for this *Quarterly*. Because, contrary to what some believe, I have poetry in my heart, I have left the incomplete sentences and the quirky punctuation untouched. I hope you enjoy the rhythm of the piece as much as I do.

In addition to a software review column by Wendy Paterson, I am inaugurating a book review column as a regular feature. I hope to be able to carry a book review related to the theme of each issue. Under deadline pressure, Kathleen Strickland, my wife, and an assistant professor of education, reviews Denny Taylor's latest book "hot off the presses," *Learning Denied*. It is sure to be one of the most talked about books of 1991 (or possibly one of the most hushed-up, depending upon your leanings in special education).

I think it's time to stop labeling and time to start learning.

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy where such endorsement is clearly specified. Copyright for articles published in *English Leadership Quarterly* reverts to the respective authors.

*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1 50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

## UNMASKING PSYCHO/BIOLOGICAL LABELS FOR LANGUAGE ACTS

by Cornelius Cosgrove
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

At the beginning of a school year, Anne Martin, a kindergarten teacher in Massachusetts, was warned to expect that one little girl in her new class would have serious learning difficulties, an assessment based on a series of cognitive tests given to Laurie (a fictitious name) the previous spring. Several weeks later, Martin concluded that the child she saw every day was far different from the one portrayed by the test results. Laurie "loved books and language" and "was clearly interested in discussions, in topics of study, in written symbols, and the world around her" (Martin, 491).

Nevertheless, the testers had recommended that Laurie leave the kindergarten three times a week to attend a "learning center," in part because "when recall required verbal information that did not have a context—verbal and number series—she was less skilled.... It appears at this time that Laurie's memory is enhanced when the information is verbal and meaningful. This has implications for Laurie's 'listening' skills" (491).

The story of Laurie dramatically illustrates the differences in perception that often separate classroom teachers from administrators of psychological screening tests. Most English teachers, I suspect, would be puzzled by the suggestion that the enhancement of memory through the existence of "context" or "meaning" indicates a learning deficiency. Many of us may ask if, in the absence of context and meaning, there is anything *to* remember. Others of us may argue that "verbal information" without a context is an impossibility and that, while poor little Laurie was not aware of any context, her examiner certainly was. In fact, our possible bewilderment or antagonism is my reason for retelling Anne Martin's anecdote. My point is that as classroom teachers, our theories of how language is acquired and used are quite distinct from those of the behavioral psychologists who devise and administer the screening tests that Laurie supposedly muffed. We are, as Edward White has recently pointed out, two distinct "discourse communities" with "realities" which are disparate and often at odds (191).

An even more important corollary is that we must consciously recall that this gap exists between the two worldviews whenever we receive a student who has been labeled "learning disabled," or "dyslexic," or "aphasic," or "neurologically impaired," or some other taxonomic term employed by special education professionals. Their labels are part of the language of a distinct discourse community. We may not be aware of the context in which they are used, or of the meaning that context gives them. Moreover, we have every right to ask what meaning the label possesses within the context of our classrooms and courses. To assume the likelihood of failure, or to expect less of that student than of another, is to give meaning to the term that our reality may not warrant.

### Two Discourse Communities/Two Realities

We must remember that to accept such labels is to accept a neurological, biological explanation for a child's difficulties in school. Depending upon the individual, such an explanation may be the right "diagnostic" path to follow. Nevertheless, the further one proceeds along that path, the more difficult it becomes to switch over to another in order to explore other possible explanations. To accept, for instance, that a student is "learning disabled" is to accept a legally sanctioned explanation that a "perceptual handicap" or "brain injury" or "minimal brain dysfunction" is interfering with "one or more of the basic psychological processes

involved in using language" (Franklin, 1). This explanation implies that emotional, environmental, cultural, and economic circumstances have been ruled out as the possible causes of academic failure. In other words, according to this explanation, it is no longer necessary to consider those factors because a student's difficulty has been clearly established; appropriate remediation can begin.

An even more elemental concern for English teachers, perhaps, is that a biological explanation demands a particular kind of evidence to support it. Emotional, environmental, cultural, and economic factors are commonly delineated through the use of anecdote and description—through linguistic forms which generate meaning by developing easily recognizable contexts. The problem with context-creating language is that it tends to individualize the subject matter and to generate the variety of interpretations to which language is inherently prone. On the other hand, a biological explanation allows—indeed demands—the use of quantifiable evidence which can then be applied to the population as a whole.

Therefore, to determine a biological cause for a child's writing difficulties, educational testers must look at those elements of writing that can be quantified. Not surprisingly, those elements have to do with errors, particularly errors in usage, grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Rose, 343). In fact, Carolyn O'Hearn remarked recently in *College English* that the examination of spelling errors is the diagnostic tool of choice when professionals identify adults and college students as learning disabled (297). English teachers attend to the same phenomena, of course, but not to the exclusion of other phenomena which we cannot or will not reduce to numerical values. Most of us probably regard such rhetorical concerns as audience awareness, clear focus, coherent organization, and varied diction as more valid measures of a writer's success than the level of surface errors. In addition, we are aware that the more we attempt to separate these elements from each other for the sake of analysis, the more we transform the piece of writing into something that is not present when we consider the piece as a whole.

It follows that to accept a biological explanation for a student's difficulties is often to accept the equation of writing with error. It further follows that to eliminate the difficulties, the best course would be to focus on the errors, directly and sequentially, and to frequently test to see if students can identify and eliminate those errors. Since the errors themselves are the focus of concern, they need not appear in an easily recognizable context, such as a student essay, but can be addressed through the kind of decontextualized manifestation that so stumped Anne Martin's student, Laurie, at the tender age of four. The orientation toward error and decontextualization often leads to pre-testing which supposedly evaluates knowledge of particular discourse conventions by isolating use of the convention in single sentences or some other kinds of "examples." A child's deficiencies are "diagnosed" and he or she is put to work on therapeutic drills or exercises. Once the convention has been "mastered," as evidenced by a post-test, the child can tackle a second diagnosed deficiency, then a third, until eventually she or he is "cured" and can produce smoothly written, error-free prose.

My readers may easily recognize the well-worked ground I'm trodding here. I am explicating a model for language education that existed long before such things as a learning disability theory ever existed, and one that has been applied to untold numbers of schoolchildren who were certainly never diagnosed as neurologically impaired. My point, nonetheless, is that to accept a biological explanation for learning difficulties is to run a clear risk of returning to just such a model, a model that has obviously fallen out of favor within our particular discourse community. Contemporary practitioners, researchers, and theorists in language learning do not consider pieces of written discourse as so easily reducible into "parts," or as interchangeable with other pieces, since rhetorical contexts are so variable and so resistant to numerical valuation. Given these analytical difficulties, and our knowledge of the idiosyncratic reactions of readers seeking to take them into account, we doubt the efficacy of short-term measures of writers' growth (Knoblauch and Brannon, 151–160). Moreover, we view writing as a recursive process, one that does not follow a replicable, nor easily identifiable, procedural sequence.

That the two discourse communities should tend toward such disparate pedagogical models is even more understandable when we consider their philosophical underpinnings. Educational psychologists are positivists who prefer to base their judgments on empirical evidence which can be translated into the supposed certainties of number. "In classical test theory, a student taking a test is presumed to have a 'true score' which accurately represents the accurate measurement of the construct being evaluated. . . . Those who use the language of true scores, objective tests, and the entire statistical view of measurement are driven by their language to envision tests as a way of achieving a vision of truth" (White, 192).

English teachers who are composition specialists more readily accept the existence of ambiguity while acknowledging, as rhetoricians, that there are questions of human existence which are beyond the scope of quantifiable observations. How students learn, and whether or not they learn what we would like them to learn, are questions that may be the province of rhetoric rather than of positivistic science (Connors, 18–19). Living every day with the variability of student texts and with the foibles inherent in their readings of those texts, English teachers gradually come to appreciate the absence of absolutes within their work. Absolutes tend to halt discussions, and English teachers are in the business of keeping discussion going. In addition, members of the composition community have been increasingly influenced by reader-response or deconstructive theories of literary criticism which argue that a certainty of meaning, or meaning that can exist outside of particular linguistic contexts, is an impossibility.

**Learning Disability Theory**

Our discourse community could, perhaps, accept the labeling and teaching of students based on a psychological and biological worldview (in other words, play by someone else's rules) if the logical and empirical supports for that worldview were strong enough to urge conviction. That, unfortunately, is not the case. For the sake of exemplification, let me focus on learning disability theory as the most visible and prevalent application of the psycho/biological orientation in our schools. Learning disability theory, as I have said, is an attempt to explain academic failure among students of apparently normal intelligence by considering the possible existence of neurological disorders. Empirical evidence to support the theory has not been forthcoming, however. Clinical researchers have had much difficulty in finding evidence of brain damage or dysfunction within subjects, and when the existence of dysfunction has been established, they have been unable to demonstrate its relationship to the subject's academic difficulties (Coles, 322–326).

Moreover, after more than a quarter-century of trying, proponents of the theory have failed to develop a definition of the term

"learning disability" that has satisfied themselves, much less their numerous critics from outside the field. Sociologists have probably been the most vocal, criticizing the theory for "masking" possible environmental causes for academic failure, such as distracting social conditions or poor teaching or inadequate school facilities (Carrier, 948). Earlier definitions of "learning disability," including the one which was incorporated into federal law in 1977, were most frequently attacked for their vagueness and broad generalizations. In fact, it has been argued that if you removed all the ambiguous and repetitious elements from the federal definition, it could be applied to any student having difficulty in school (Franklin, 2). More recent definitions are characterized by the precision with which they delineate what is not known about the condition. For instance, a 1981 definition drafted by the National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities calls learning disabilities a "generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders" and admits that the disorders are only "presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction" (Cosgrove, 8). There is substantial evidence that applications of the federal definition in identifying learning disabled students around the country have been inconsistent, erroneous, or both at once (Shepard, Smith, and Vojir; Singer, et al.; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Epps).

Vague definitions which could be applied to a large portion of the school population, along with the hasty and highly variable applications which have naturally arisen from such definitions, must cause those among us who most lean toward empiricism to turn completely away from theories of neurologically attributable learning difficulties. Advocates of these theories, however, might still win the acquiescence of those who resist the valuing of positivistic "truths" over all others, by demonstrating how application of the same theories leads to apparently beneficial educational outcomes. Learning disability professionals induce institutional recognition of students who are having academic difficulties and commandeer resources which are directed toward helping these students. Labeled students receive individualized attention and instruction that probably would not be available to them if the category did not exist.

This is a seductive argument, based on considerations which can be justified without the existence of substantial empirical evidence. But there are equally pragmatic considerations which can either lessen or refute its persuasive force, depending on one's point of view. The first consideration grows out of the consistent and habitual insistence of learning disability professionals on the permanence of the condition. A neurological impairment is, after all, a neurological impairment—a "handicap" by definition. A "learning disabled" student can no more rid him- or herself of it through hard work, therapeutic techniques, or willpower than could a thalidomide child rid him- or herself of a shriveled limb. All that a special educator can purport to do is to help the student adjust to the condition and to develop strategies that might help circumvent it.

Being labeled on the basis of a psycho/biological explanation for learning difficulties must do more than increase the amount of attention a student receives. Being identified as having a permanent "disability" must influence a student's self-image and the expectations teachers, counselors, and administrators have for that student (Kelley, B2). For a student, the diagnosis invites both confusion and resignation. He or she has been singled out, or "individualized" if you will, because of academic achievement that is considered below the student's potential. The student is then told that the reason for her or his poor performance is a permanent, biologically determined shortfall in the way she or he processes information. If the student's potential is defined by his or her neurological impairment, how can the student expect to do better under such circumstances? The learning disabled student will not expect to excel academically, just as a child born with a shriveled limb will not expect to play major league baseball (Jim Abbott notwithstanding).

Research indicates that labels influence how teachers, counselors, and school administrators view a child's potential. One recent study, for instance, indicated "that the sexually abused label may lead teachers to demand and expect less academically even in situations where a child is capable of more" (Bromfield, Bromfield, and Weiss, 96). This reaction also works in reverse: students for whom low expectations already exist, such as minorities and the poor, are more likely to receive a label indicating neurological impairment (Christensen, Gerber, and Everhart, 327; Tucker, 102).

A second pragmatic consideration, perhaps the most important one for our discourse community, concerns the impact of a psycho/biological worldview on a language curriculum. I have already devoted some space to how such a perspective lends itself to a model of learning and development that our profession has been busily rejecting for the last quarter-century. A model that is sequential, error-based, and dependent on numerical information for its judgments demands frequent testing of a kind that we may not consider reflective of the goals of an English class. Testing becomes so common that it may take the place of teaching, and so restrictive in its scope that concepts which do not lend themselves to quantifiable test structures are no longer taught. In fact, a first-grade teacher who believes in the use of "behavioral objectives" was asked by Edward White how behavioral objectives might be written for such staples of the first-grade curriculum as storytelling or art. She replied—"cheerfully," to use White's diction—"We just don't teach those things anymore" (195).

It may be argued that the curricular model described above need not be applied generally, but only to those students who have been diagnosed as learning disabled. Unfortunately, the only characteristic of learning disabled students that clearly distinguishes them from other students not-so-labeled is their poor academic achievement. A link between their supposed neurological dysfunctions and their academic performance has not been established. If it has not been demonstrated that learning-disabled students think, or stumble in their thinking, in ways that are different from our other students, then why should we teach them differently? The only way to justify a different curricular approach would be to have different expectations for these students. If, rather than wanting them to become rhetorically aware, procedurally flexible, intellectually inquisitive writers, we instead want them to overcome their past difficulties with, let's say, "verbal information that did not have a context," then a different curricular approach might be in order.

A third practical consideration is the effect of "pull-outs," or the practice of removing students from their assigned classrooms to receive service from reading, speech, or learning disability specialists. Anne Martin concludes that the approach is disruptive and harmful to all students, and complains that some elementary classes "have so many entrances and exits that the teacher hardly ever has the whole class together at one time" (500). Another danger is that "pull-outs" might be perceived as resolving other educational problems that are important to English teachers, such as large classes. If those students who cannot cope with normal institutional circumstances have been identified and removed, then the argument will be made that classes of thirty to forty pupils can function successfully. Good reasons for small English classes, other than the presence of identifiable low-achievers, can be more easily ignored.

It is tempting, and perhaps quite common, for English teachers to passively accept the psycho/biological terminology that is commonly bandied about in our schools as the intellectual currency of disciplines we admittedly know little about. But it is also important to remember that this same terminology, and the disparate ways it is interpreted, has a direct impact on how our students define themselves and are defined by others, as well as a less obvious influence on our working conditions and our curriculum. I suggest that we keep three things in mind whenever we are confronted by the results of psychological testing and by teaching materials and structures that are guided by psychological and biological theories of learning.

1. The educational psychologists and special education professionals who screen, test, label, and place our students work from linguistic constructs and consequent worldviews quite distinctive from our own, and sometimes at odds with our own.
2. Scientifically, the labels in question often have not clearly defined the disorders they supposedly identify, nor has the existence of these disorders been clearly established by research.
3. In terms of practical educational applications, arguments delineating the benefits of such labeling can be countered by arguments delineating its dangers. Some of these latter arguments have particular relevance for English teachers.

**Works Cited**


Bromfield, Richard, Debra Bromfield, and Bahr Weiss. 1988. "Influence of the Sexually Abused Label on Perceptions of a Child's Failure." *Journal of Educational Research* 82 (2): 96–98.

Carrier, James G. 1983. "Masking the Social in Educational Knowledge: The Case of Learning Disability Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 88: 948–974.

Christensen, Carol A., Michael M. Gerber, and Robert B. Everhart. 1986. "Toward a Sociological Perspective of Learning Disabilities." *Educational Theory* 36: 317–331.

Coles, Gerald S. 1978. "The Learning Disabilities Test Battery: Empirical and Social Issues." *Harvard Educational Review* 48: 313–340.

Connors, Robert J. 1983. "Composition Studies and Science." *College English* 45: 1–20.

Cosgrove, Cornelius. 1990. "Science in American Public Discourse: Challenging Certainty through Writing." Paper presented at the ninth annual Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, University Park, Pennsylvania. (Copies available from the author upon request.)

Franklin, Barry M. 1987. "Introduction: Learning Disability and the Need for Dissenting Essays." In *Learning Disability: Dissenting Essays*, edited by B. M. Franklin, 1–12. London: The Falmer Press.

Kelley, John. 1987. "Labels Like 'Learning Disabled' Are Curses that Serve to Hinder Students' Development." *Chronicle of Higher Education* August 16, B1–2.

Knoblauch, C. H., and Lil Brannon. 1984. *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*. Upper Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton/Cook.

Martin, Anne. 1988. "Screening, Early Intervention, and Remediation: Obscuring Children's Potential." *Harvard Educational Review* 58: 488–501.

O'Hearn, Carolyn. 1989. "Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer." *College English* 51: 294–304.

Rose, Mike. 1985. "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University." *College English* 47: 341–359.

Shepard, Lorrie A., Mary Lee Smith, and Carol P. Vojir. 1983. "Characteristics of Pupils Identified as Learning Disabled." *American Educational Research Journal* 20: 309–331.

Singer, Judith D., et al. 1989. "Variation in Special Education Classification across School Districts: How Does Where You Live Affect What You Are Labeled?" *American Educational Research Journal* 26: 261–281.

Tucker, James A. 1980. "Ethnic Proportions in Classes for the Learning Disabled: Issues in Nonbiased Assessment." *The Journal of Special Education* 14: 93–105.

White, Edward M. 1990. "Language and Reality in Writing Assessment." *College Composition and Communication* 41: 187–200.

Ysseldyke, James, Bob Algozzine, and Susan Epps. 1983. "A Logical and Empirical Analysis of Current Practice in Classifying Students as Handicapped." *Exceptional Children* 50: 160–166.


## "SKILLS KIDS" AND REAL LITERATURE


by Sharon Wieland
Sacramento City Unified School District, California


At our school we call them "skills kids." When I was in high school, they were the Zs of X, Y, and Z. In other schools they are called "competency" students, "developmental" students, and "low-level" students.

They are kids like big Wanda, fifteen years old, 6'2", 180 pounds. Don't mess with Wanda. And Jason, curly-headed, giggling nervously, seeing sexual innuendos in every remark. And Sylvia, the hardest-hitting volleyball player in the school. Just let her know the basic class requirements; she'll do them. And Gustavo, the shortest boy in the class, his hair perfectly groomed, gleaming and black, his shy eyes watching for trouble. And Chad, tall, loud, grinning, labeled dyslexic many years ago. And James, devouring one science fiction book after another, hanging around after class to relate what was happening in the latest chapter. And Uzma, her thick plait reaching her waist, sitting up front, wanting to please. And Ethian, everybody's laugh, everybody's pet. Alicia, José, Satrina, Quintrice, and all the rest made up my ninth-grade "skills" class. Only Uzma and one or two others came to school regularly. Ethian, Chad, and James had been in fights. Many of them worked after school and into the night. One of them lived in the back of a truck.

Our classroom was one end of a wide closed-off hallway in what had once been a dream of an open-plan school. Portable walls had long since been brought in to correct the strange, mistaken ideas of the district's architect. Of course, Mr. Silva's students still had to walk through our room to get to theirs. And if the teacher next door wanted to show a movie, we, too, had to sit in the dark because one switch controlled the whole area. But we were used to that. At the other end of our "hallway" room was another class just like ours, another group of ninth-grade "skills kids."

It was these two classes, mine and the one next door, who participated in a classroom research project that I conducted in the spring of the year, when I began to wonder what would happen if "skills kids" were allowed to use some of the real literature that the college prep classes used, instead of using *Scope* magazine and

a watered-down reader that had been written not by recognized authors, but by "editors" and "consultants" from the publishing company. I knew that most of the writing the skills students had done was short answers to short questions at the end of short "literary" selections. I wondered if it would make any difference if I could get José to stay awake in class long enough to read a real piece of literature.

In setting up the experiment, I decided that my class would be the experimental group because I would design a treatment curriculum for them. The class next door would be the control group because their teacher would continue exactly as before with the reader, its questions, a weekly vocabulary list and test, a weekly spelling list and test, the Friday Scantron test on the reading selection, and grammar exercises from *Warriner's* for homework.

I prepared the materials for the experiment. I found my son's large-print copy of the Bible and photocopied the "Book of Ruth" and the "Song of Solomon." Next, I duplicated the "Death of Absalom" from a copy of McGuffy's Sixth Reader that I found way back on a dark shelf in the bookroom. One day when the other teachers had all gone home, I furtively copied Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, Epistle 1 from Pope's "Essay on Man," and about 300 lines of *Beowulf* from the twelfth-grade literature text, marking the pages into ten- to fifteen-line segments. At home among my videotape collection, I found the *Taming of the Shrew* with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor and Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*.

After I had collected my materials, I prepared the lessons. I divided each class period into three segments: copying, reading orally, and viewing videotapes. During the first fifteen minutes of class the students copied text from the Bible. I handed them ditto copies at the door as they entered. I made a supply of lined paper and pencils available. When they finished the activity, the students counted how many lines they had copied, circled that number in the margin of their papers, and handed in the ditto with their copying. The next day they began where they left off the day before. They received one point for each line copied perfectly.

During the second fifteen minutes, we had oral reading. We began with two or three minutes of silent reading for practice. During this time I moved about the room pronouncing words and answering questions. Then volunteers read any marked segment they wished. At first they read standing by their desks, receiving ten points for a perfectly pronounced section. Later José announced that he would read from the front of the room if he could have extra points. Others followed his lead. A few days after that, students wanted extra points if they announced their names before reading. I gave them extra points for standing while reading, going to the front of the room, and announcing their names. I did not give extra credit for getting the class's attention. They took care of that themselves: "You guys shut up when I'm reading!"

Ethian read the same passage over and over, day after day. Everyone else read different passages, sometimes the same one a friend was reading, most often the passage following the one they had read the day before. If we had time, they could earn even more points by reading a second time.

During the third part of the class, we watched videotapes of Shakespeare's plays, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Taming of the Shrew*. I considered the viewing as a way of immersing the students in good literature. On the first day, I told the class what they would be seeing in the play before I showed the tape. On the other days, I would sometimes stop the tape and ask what they thought was happening. Usually they knew. The most important job I had was explaining the ever-changing relationships between the characters—that and convincing our media department that, yes, I did, in fact, need the VCR every single day.

We continued in this way for six weeks. During the fifth week I prepared a cloze test. I selected ten lines from *Beowulf*, five lines from the "Book of Ruth," four lines from "Song of Solomon," four lines from "Absalom," five lines from *Paradise Lost*, six lines from "Essay on Man," and seven lines from Emerson's "Self-Reliance." I numbered and typed each selection, leaving a blank for every seventh word of the passage. Because the students had viewed the videotapes rather than read the actual plays of Shakespeare, I did not use any passages from the plays in the test. The students in the experimental group had read from *Beowulf*, *Paradise Lost*, and "Essay on Man." They had copied from the biblical selections. They had never before seen the Emerson selection. The control group had not experienced any of the literature.

I directed both groups to read each selection and fill in the blanks with words that made the best sense or seemed to fit.

My next step was to collect the cloze tests and score them. In both groups, twelve students were present on the test day and responded on the cloze test. I assigned points for each blank on the test: three points if the student used the original word from the text, two points for a word close to that of the original, one point for a word that sounded like the original word, zero points if no word was written in the blank or if the word written did not sound or mean the same as the original.

For each item, I recorded points for all responses and totaled the points. Then I divided by twelve, the number of responses, to get an average for each item. Next, I totaled the points for all of the items and divided to get the overall average. Thus, I had an "average" number of points for each item and an "average" for the overall test for each group. Table 1 shows the average score for each item, as well as the overall average for the test.

I did not run a test of significant difference, but I was impressed. I was particularly impressed with the score difference on the Emerson selection. Neither of the groups had seen that item nor anything from Emerson before, yet the experimental group outscored the control group by nearly three-and-a-half points average score.

As teachers we all act on the basis of theory. Testing our theories gives us reason to defend or deny them. I speculated from my theory that the type of reading material to which my "skills" students were exposed would affect their choice of vocabulary in writing. Of course, I was not hoping to have my students think, talk, or write like Emerson. I was not trying to have them understand Emerson's ideas or be able to discuss, answer questions about, and pass tests

Table 1: Average Scores of Experimental and Control Groups on Cloze Test

| | Average Scores | |
|---|---|---|
| Selection | Experimental | Control |
| *Beowulf* | 6.4 | 3.0 |
| "Book of Ruth" | 3.0 | 2.7 |
| "Song of Solomon" | 5.7 | 4.3 |
| "Absalom" | 4.0 | 6.0 |
| *Paradise Lost* | 2.0 | 1.2 |
| "Essay on Man" | 4.5 | 3.7 |
| "Self-Reliance" | 9.0 | 5.7 |
| Overall Average | 35.2 | 27.2 |

on Emerson's essay. Rather, I had simply wondered whether good literature—real literature—would make a difference to them. I had wondered if it would improve their word choice. Somehow I suppose I was hoping they would develop an ear for the sound of words, phrases, and sentences—that they would begin to choose one word over another because it "sounded better." Because writers often listen to the sound of the prose they write and make judgments based seemingly on no more than sound—one word sounds better than another, revisions often come from choosing the way one word sounds versus the way another word sounds. I assumed that my "skills kids," who had always been given readers instead of literature books, who had not had many chances to read or hear good literature, were not familiar with classical cadences. I wanted to test my theory in a simple way.

Because I wanted to take a short, direct look, I did not check drafts of their own writing. Rather I looked at the choices they made in supplying certain words within a given text. I was not so much interested in checking for understanding or memory as I was in wondering what influence the original texts would have on the kinds of words the students would choose.

I had read of researchers who had questions similar to mine (Tierney, R. J., and M. Leys, 1986; "What Is the Value of Connecting Reading and Writing?" in B. Peterson, *Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing*, pp. 15–29; Urbana, IL: NCTE). Tierney and Leys reported findings that children who used a basal series containing stilted language produced writing that contained stilted language.

Tierney and Leys found that children reported that not only do they get topics, ideas, formats, and stylistic options from books and stories they read, but they also get certain kinds of words to use in their own writing. For example, they wrote about one child who reported getting "showy words" from good books and another who said, ". . . I get new words for my writing [from books]."

I expected to see the direct effect of these words, if any, on my students' choices of words for the blanks of the cloze test. Even though many of the words needed for the blanks were common, everyday words, some of them were "new" and "showy" words specifically related to the literature from which they came. I felt that my "skills kids" were choosing new words and "showy" words. These were words they would not ordinarily use because they were different words than those used in the "literary" selections my students had been accustomed to reading.

Admittedly, my research was based upon a narrow view, a curriculum that many teachers would be unable in good conscience to accept—copying, parroting, and kicking back. We more often want our students to read with comprehension, write creatively from the depths of their own struggle to make meaning, and to experience drama with emotion, analysis, and a willingness to investigate character development, theme, and plot. However, I proved something to myself within the context of my own teaching theory: Wanda, Jason, and Gustavo don't need baby lessons. They can profit from difficult literature and "showy" words. I think I'll keeping working on other curricular strategies to help them.

## TRACKING OR SIDETRACKING?

by Carole Bencich
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Tracking, a system of placing students by achievement scores, learning styles, behavior patterns, or career intentions—and inevitably labeling students—is intended to accommodate differences in emotional, intellectual, and academic development among groups of children. A gap between theory and practice fuels the debate over tracking, a practice which is widespread and deeply engrained in American curriculum. Proponents of tracking argue that such a system reduces the risk of frustration for some students and the danger of boredom for others. In theory, tracked students learn at a pace that allows them to succeed. In practice, however, ability grouping consigns some students to a repetitive and reductive sidetrack curriculum, and channels others into a more challenging fast track of conceptual knowledge and inquiry.

John Goodlad, in his 1984 study, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill), describes a significantly divided curriculum in American schools, citing the disproportionate numbers of African American and Hispanic students in basic level programs. Goodlad questions the educational benefits claimed for tracking and warns of the negative side effects which in effect deny many students access to knowledge. "Ability grouping and tracking appear not to produce the expected gains in students' achievement," he concludes (p. 51).

### The Myth of Homogeneity

When *English Journal* asked its March 1990 Round Table respondents for commentary on tracking, not one teacher wrote in support of ability grouping. Instead, the replies from six teachers spoke of the enrichment of classrooms through diversity; the humanizing effect of mixing social classes, races, and ethnic backgrounds; and the gains in self-confidence, skills, and cooperative behaviors which accrued to students in heterogeneous classrooms.

By December, however, three teachers had written to *English Journal* defending the other side of the tracking issue. The December writers offered convincing proof that tracking could be made to serve all students well, while admitting that tracking might indeed favor some advanced students and stigmatize basic students. A tracked program works with "proper placement, small classes, teacher training and support, a well designed curriculum, and healthy goals," argued Ellen Jo Ljung ("Tracking: A Rebuttal," p. 70). Class size figured prominently in these discussions. "To eliminate tracking without addressing class size is like pulling off the top of a weed and leaving the root to flourish," said Vicky Greenbaum ("Some Are More Equal than Others," p. 68).

Arguments in support of tracking encourage the myth of homogeneity among both teachers and students. In an effort to achieve group similarity, the tracked curriculum establishes an academic/vocational polarity, with options based upon the projected career choices of students, as well as their abilities. Further refinement of the tracked curriculum creates three tracks, adding one in the middle to serve the large group of "average" youngsters who either cannot or will not master advanced academic challenges, but who nevertheless wish to retain the option of post-secondary education. When three tracks fail to provide adequate homogeneity, classes for gifted and learning disabled children must be added. Yet even when I taught in a five-track-plus-exceptional-education system, some spoke of the need for additional subdivisions to eliminate the wide range of abilities in the middle track. Parental or societal pressures regularly supersede academic criteria for placement, thus further eroding the theory behind tracking.

### The Truth of Heterogeneity

Every teacher knows of students who are "misplaced," and therefore either not working up to their potential or going through the

minimum learning behaviors in an advanced class. The truth is, every class has as many tracks as there are students. Every student is a track unto himself or herself. Test scores and other external criteria which suggest that some children are similar to one another merely mask other differentiating factors.

Worst of all, the myth of homogeneity leads some teachers to believe they can rely on whole class instruction. If individualization has been accomplished by ability grouping, they reason, then one specially tailored curriculum, one textbook at an appropriate reading level, and one set of expectations will suffice for the entire class. Such a myth assumes that students of similar abilities will respond in a similar way to appropriate methods and materials, will arrive easily at similar solutions to problems, and will reinforce one another in their mastery of new learning.

The myth of homogeneity ignores the rich possibilities of divergent thought and the shared construction of meaning which can result from multiple interpretations, varied backgrounds, and expanded linguistic codes. James Moffett points out the limiting effects upon language when students are grouped. Disadvantaged children "can learn standard English only by speaking with people who use it," he notes (1983, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, p. 94; Boston: Houghton Mifflin). On the other hand, advantaged children can benefit from learning the "emotive and communal uses of language as well as the mythic and metaphoric qualities of lower class speech" (p. 94). Thus, while tracking keeps some students out of the literacy club by preventing their exposure to academic discourse and behaviors, it bars other students from involvement with the multicultural language and attitudes of a rapidly changing world.

Goodlad calls tracking a "self-fulfilling prophecy" because "the work of upper and lower groups becomes more sharply differentiated with each passing day" (p. 141). By fourth grade, he points out, the spread in scholastic achievement, as measured by test scores, is four to six grade levels. Self-esteem varies correspondingly: students understand very early in life that if they do not want to go to college, they will not be held accountable for demanding academic performance. As Paula Hatfield put it in the March 1990 *English Journal* Round Table, they become "in-school dropouts" ("From the Other Side of the Tracking," p. 75).

Labels such as "basic" and "advanced" become as familiar to students as old T-shirts. They form a kind of identity, with "basic" carrying as much cachet in some circles as "advanced" does in others. A top-down decision to end tracking would accomplish little. Evolutionary change of American curriculum—using collaborative methods, team teaching, and voluntary programs—would let students merge their own individual tracks into a collective pathway of learning.

## FLOR: A LEARNING DISABLED CHILD IN A WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

by Deborah Wells
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

Flor, a student in third grade, is tall with brown eyes, her brown hair held in place with a plastic hairband, though her bangs always escape. Pushing the bangs out of her eyes, she pointed to a story, "The Kite" from Arnold Lobel's *Days With Frog and Toad* and said, "I don't like this story because it doesn't make sense; I don't think it makes sense to me. It probably does to someone else."

Flor approaches reading with the expectation that a text is supposed to make sense whether she understands it or not; she recognizes that a function of print is to communicate something to a reader. Not only does print contain meaning, but Flor knows it is capable of providing pleasure and satisfaction. Flor did like other stories in the book. She recognized the entertainment value of reading, the excitement of a well-told story. "When you read it," she commented, "you finish it, and you think, I liked it a lot; it was exciting."

For Flor, interacting with written language is an active process of meaning-making. In her classroom, a third-grade whole language classroom in the Southwest, the site for a qualitative study I conducted to understand literacy learning, Flor was indeed a literate person (Wells 1988). Paradoxically, she was also identified and labeled as a student with a "learning disability."

### The Learning Disabilities Classroom

When asked about leaving her whole language classroom each morning to attend her learning disabilities class, Flor replied, "I just don't like it 'cause I miss a lot of things in this class." The activities of the learning disabilities class were confusing, as she described them:

> You read like all the above. Those are the words that belong in the word, and you don't know, and you say the conference things, the silent words, and then you have to say 'ee', 'eh', 'a', then easy 'ee', 'eh', 'a' breath take and then there's these words and you go like 'uh' we do use at the end of English words and then 'a' we do not use at the end of English words.

Flor's interpretative description of the instruction in the learning disabilities classroom reflects a skills-oriented curriculum, an approach based on the belief that reading is composed of separate skills that can be identified, taught, and practiced (DeFord 1985). Although Flor described the rules she was supposed to use when she encountered an unfamiliar word, I never observed her using that approach to regain lost meaning from print. For Flor, the learning disabilities program focused on her weakest area—decoding unknown words—and did not build on her basic strength—reading for meaning. Learning disabilities programs should take a holistic focus with an emphasis on a child's strengths, interests, and abilities, according to Hollingsworth and Reutzel (1988). For Flor, her regular classroom fulfilled this need.

### A Literate Classroom

The classroom in which Flor spent most of her day was a literate environment. Tradebooks were abundant, filling two large shelves. Rich with the printed word, the walls displayed students' work and teacher-made charts. Specific areas of the room were set aside for revising and editing student-authored texts; these areas contained dictionaries, paper, pens, pencils, and editing checklists. The students' desks were pushed together to form tables, an arrangement that encouraged dialogue among students. The classroom was full of activity; students were always talking, writing, or reading. Through interactions with print and with each other, students developed a wide range of literate behaviors.

Martha, Flor's teacher, viewed literacy from a whole language perspective, a belief that literacy is a meaningful social process that is used to communicate for a variety of reasons. Teachers whose actions are shaped by such beliefs understand that language, both oral and written, is learned through functional use in a variety of contexts (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores 1990; Goodman 1986). In Martha's classroom, literacy was an ideological practice—embedded, learned, and used in social contexts (Bloome 1987; Street 1984). In Martha's classroom, Flor was a competent, functioning member of a literate community, not a child with special needs because of a learning disability.

Through interactions with print and with other literate individuals, Flor developed her expectation that print was always sup-

posed to make sense and was used to communicate within a social context. She also recognized a relationship between the published texts she read and the texts she composed. Flor was able to recognize the shifting demands of classroom literacy events and participated fully in them. Finally, Flor was able to display the behaviors of a literate person and use literacy to accomplish specific goals, both personal and academic.

Several characteristics of this whole language classroom helped Flor function as a competent member of the classroom community rather than as a learning disabled student. These characteristics include (1) a belief that literacy learning is a holistic process, (2) a belief that learning is by nature a social activity, and (3) a belief that curricula should allow students to make connections between school learning and their lives outside of school.

**Literacy Learning as a Holistic Process**

Literacy programs that are based on students' needs and interests can enable all students to become literate, despite any labels that may be placed on them by others. Instruction in Martha's classroom reflected a belief that written language is learned as a natural process occurring when children grow up in literate societies, in much the same way oral language is ordinarily learned (Ferriero and Teberosky 1982; Harste, Woodward, and Burke 1984; Holdaway 1979). Three distinct literacy events formed the morning routine: story reading of a featured author read aloud by the teacher, writing time using a process approach, and tradebook reading discussed in literature study groups.

None of these literacy events took place in isolation. Martha believed strongly in integration and enabling students to be active meaning makers, discovering connections between reading, writing, and their lives both in and out of school. Such integration may be the key to helping children who are labeled "learning disabled" (Hollingsworth and Reutzel 1988).

Through participation in a variety of literacy events, Flor developed an awareness of the functions of print and used the skills of reading and writing in an integrated, purposeful way. She wrote every day and spent time discussing literature that she read or that was read aloud to her. These events enabled Flor to understand the writing process that all authors share. She hypothesized how Lobel came to write *Days With Frog and Toad*: "He probably, first he wrote like those things if it's exciting, then he put his periods, his commas, and then he put a capital letter at the first of the page. . . . Then he drew it. He probably got a frog and drew it."

Flor's analysis of Lobel's writing process reflected the steps she herself used to compose. All of Flor's stories were first person narratives, descriptions of lived-through events. She wrote slowly, often laboring over the spelling of words. She added to drafts she had written but usually did not revise the content. She edited her papers with the help of peers or teachers, but an internalization of the revision process was absent. Although Flor gained more control over the mechanics of writing, she was still in a one-draft stage.

Yet Flor was viewed as a competent writer in Martha's class, even though many of the students wrote longer stories with more control of the mechanics and showed more evidence of planning and revision. She shared her drafts with the class, answered their questions, and accepted their suggestions. Flor was not disabled by her difficulties with spelling or recopying, even though her writing may have been less sophisticated than other students. She viewed literacy as an integrated process and recognized the relationship between her writing and the tradebooks she read. This understanding enabled Flor to be a competent classroom member with increasing control over the mechanics of reading and writing.

**The Social Nature of Learning**

Learning always occurs within a social context; meaning is created through interactions with others and participants learn culturally specific ways of interacting within literacy events (Heath 1983). Many of the interactions in Martha's classroom reflected the social nature of learning. Students helped each other to act competently and display appropriate behaviors in the classroom. Sylvia showed Flor how to find her cumulative writing folder and Antonio reminded her not to raise her hand during the time set aside for silent writing.

In this classroom, reading did not have to be a silent, individual activity. Many literacy events were collaborative, and students negotiated the meaning of a text together. One day Flor and Antonio were reading a *Family Circus* book that Antonio had brought from home. One cartoon showed a father sitting in an easy chair, smoking a pipe. As smoke rings rose from the pipe, one of the children in the cartoon asked for a donut. Antonio read aloud the caption, "Mommy, can I have a donut?" Flor listened but made no comment.

Antonio and Flor then discussed the number of children in the family. Antonio said that there were three; Flor disagreed and said four. To support her claim, Flor showed Antonio the illustration, and he agreed with her. She then said, "Oh, look it! Now I know what you mean. He thinks these [the smoke rings] is donuts. That's why he says, 'Mommy, can I have a donut?' "

The negotiation of meaning took place in a social context that valued risk-taking and collaboration as part of being a competent student. Flor did not hesitate to disagree with Antonio's interpretation of the text. She also felt free to reveal her initial lack of comprehension with the caption. The social climate in this whole language classroom enabled Flor to take chances, to assert her point of view, and to admit that there were times when she did not understand.

A classroom, however, is not a perfect world, and while students in Martha's classroom were collaborative, social interaction is sometimes competitive. For example, a student at Flor's table, Albert, one day began to compare numbers of pages in the tradebooks each student was reading. Flor, continuing to read, tried to ignore Albert, but he was persistent. Even though Flor's book was easier to read, it was a long book. After everyone at the table had shared the number of pages in their books, it turned out that Flor had the longest book. Albert ended the discussion with a short, "So?" Despite differences in ability, Flor was able to maintain her status as a competent member of the classroom community.

Within this whole language classroom, both collaboration and competition existed. The social context allowed Flor to ask others for help and to collaborate in creating an interpretation of a text. The emphasis of the interactions was not on Flor's errors, but on communication. Rather than mastery of particular skills, growth and development were what counted as success. Flor's "disability" did not disable her in Martha's classroom.

**Relating the Curriculum to Life Outside of School**

In a student-centered classroom, literacy events are related to students' lives, their needs, interests, and experiences contextualized and embedded in reflections about common experiences and cultural backgrounds (Greene 1978; Fishman 1987). In Martha's whole language classroom, literacy events were an integral part

of classroom life and were always related to students' lives both in and out of school.

While Flor's parents were interested in her education, Flor never mentioned reading at home. School literacy may not have influenced home literacy events, yet Flor found many ways to bring her home life into the school curriculum. Flor wrote about topics that reflected the Hispanic culture of which she was a part: she described the Green Dance at a wedding in which money is pinned to a bride's dress; she wrote about frequent trips to Mexico. She also included topics reflecting mainstream American culture: she wrote about the costumes she and her brothers and sisters planned to wear for Halloween. Flor's stories reflected different aspects of the cultures of which she was a member, and all of her stories reflected lived-through, personal experiences.

Flor occasionally received help identifying potential writing topics, but she retained control of what was included or deleted from the text. In a conference prior to sharing with the class her story, "The Day I Went to Mexico," Martha asked Flor to read just the first part of her story. Flor did so, but the complete story appeared in the published book, including this passage:

> My dad and some other men got a beer. He's not supposed to because he went to the doctor. The doctor said he has a bad liver, but he still drinks, but I still love him, and my mom and my sister and my brothers.

Flor was able to shape the classroom curriculum to meet her goals, and she retained control of the story she wanted told, enabling her to make connections between school literacy events and her life outside of school.

**Summary**

Although Flor read easier books and wrote less sophisticated stories than some of her classmates, she was still able to use print to meet her personal and academic needs. The literate environment of the whole language classroom built upon Flor's abilities, not her disabilities.

Educators can meet the needs of all students, even the learning disabled students, by establishing a literate classroom environment in which language is used for a variety of authentic purposes. When success was viewed as much more than mastery of a set of isolated skills, Flor and all her classmates—everyone—could become successful participants in a literate community.

Flor was successful in learning to read and write because the context in which reading and writing was practiced shaped what was learned from those literacy events. Flor learned reading and writing in the same ways she and other children learned to speak—in meaningful contexts to communicate for real, functional purposes. Flor and her classmates learned the meaning of a text could be jointly constructed because the social nature of learning encouraged collaboration. Relating the school curriculum to the students' lives outside of school enabled Flor and her classmates to recognize the connections between their lives and reading and writing. This context enabled all the students, despite their differences (or "disabilities"), to be successful in learning to read and write.

**Works Cited**


Bloome, D. 1987. "Reading as a Social Process in a Middle School Classroom." In *Literacy and Schooling*, edited by D. Bloome. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

DeFord, D. 1985. "Validating the Construct of Theoretical Orientation in Reading Instruction." *Reading Research Quarterly* 20: 351–367.

Edelsky, C., B. Altwerger, and B. M. Flores. 1990. *Whole Language: What's the Difference?* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Ferreiro, E., and A. Teberosky. 1982. *Literacy before Schooling*. Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Fishman, A. R. 1987. "Literacy and Cultural Context: A Lesson from the Amish." *Language Arts* 64: 842–854.

Goodman, K. S. 1986. *What's Whole in Whole Language?* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Greene, M. 1978. *Landscapes of Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Harste, J. C., V. A. Woodward, and C. L. Burk. 1984. *Language Stories and Literacy Lessons*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Heath, S. B. 1983. *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holdaway, D. 1979. *The Foundations of Literacy*. Sydney: Ashton-Scholastic.

Hollingsworth, P. M., and D. R. Reutzel. 1988. "Whole Language with LD Children." *Academic Therapy* 23: 477–488.

Street, B. V. 1984. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, D. 1988. "Literacy in a Third Grade Whole Language Classroom." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 50: 76A.


## ROOM TO TALK: OPENING POSSIBILITIES WITH THE "AT-RISK"


by Suzanne Miller
State University of New York at Albany


At-risk students, even more than other students, need to engage in classroom conversations in order to make personal sense of what they read and hear and write. They need to engage in classroom conversations in order to transform their often narrow images of who they are becoming.

Students defend themselves from school frustrations and pressures by calling classes too boring to attend or attend to, concludes a student-interview study done by Edwin Farrell, discussed in *Hanging In and Dropping Out* (1990, New York: Teachers College Press). Many doze through class to passively resist judgments of incompetence: My teacher "thinks I'm a joke" (p. 93). Yet, when classes are taught by teachers they perceive as caring, nonjudgmental, and attentive to students, these same students described classes as "interesting." Disaffected students make similar judgments about teachers in other studies. Mike Rose, for example, interweaves compelling stories of underprepared students with ones of his own years as a student in vocational education classes (1989, *Lives on the Boundary*, New York: Penguin Books). In these classrooms, what Rose calls the "dumping ground for the disaffected" (p. 26), students put in time, bound in passive roles, their own languages and realities out of place. In sharp contrast, Rose details the dramatic impact of teachers who recognize the real needs of students, engaging their lives and imaginations. The teachers who made a difference found ways for students to use their own language to "talk about [books] in ways that fostered growth" (p. 58). Such teachers gave Rose a way to feel special by using his mind, guiding him into conversations that at first seemed "foreign and threatening."

Ultimately, individual teachers either reinforce institutional messages about failure or push them aside to open up new possibilities for students. In the talk of the classroom—what questions the teachers ask, how they engage students, what parts students are allowed to play—the curriculum emerges, sending significant

messages to the at-risk student. However, the powerful dialogues central to strong teaching may be displaced by institutional or program requirements for "covering" material, for completing certain skill sheets, and for reading only approved texts. A dead-end curriculum segregates troublesome students so they can put in time with packaged or textbook skill sequences. Remediation such as this signals low expectations and promotes passivity—what Paulo Friere calls "the culture of silence"—because students are treated as objects to be filled rather than subjects who must create their own knowledge (1968, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: The Seabury Press).

**Making Room for Conversation**

During my six months as an observer in an at-risk program, one recently cited by NCTE for excellence, I saw students learning to enter such conversations, students who had failed in regular classes. This at-risk program focuses on the whole student—intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically—through behavior and attendance contracts, peer counseling, and extra program activities, and, in English class, by engaging them in discussions of what they read.

During my observations of an at-risk senior English class, I saw their teacher, Laura, consistently make space for real conversations so that her students could think, make connections, and feel important. Before, during, and after reading she asked for students' spontaneous responses in what Nancy Martin calls their "ready-at-hand language" (1983, *Mostly About Writing*, p. 8; Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook), often captured first in journals and then shared in discussion. Though at first reluctant, students became increasingly willing to think about things when they saw that Laura was willing to listen to whatever they had to say. She would acknowledge and encourage alternative responses—but not evaluate or look for right interpretations. Students' informal, everyday language gave access to thinking and feeling, arousing further questions and reactions. Laura searched for texts to invite this current of conversation and found them in songs and movies, in adolescent, modern, and multicultural novels and, sometimes, in the classic texts of the senior curriculum.

Laura worked to extend her at-risk students' abilities to read and think through discussion. She modeled strategies for elaborating initial responses by probing in a genuinely puzzled way, "Why do you think?" or asking "Do you know anybody like that?" and "How do you connect that experience to the story?" Sometimes she would read aloud, stopping to ask about possible implications, meanings, and problems. This collaborative reading made external the internal dialogue of reading, modeling a reader's ongoing conversation with the text concerning its possibilities. Students that I interviewed said they began to "ask questions to ourselves" as they read, and to wonder if there were "enough clues to give us a reason to think a certain way." Laura saw her students developing what she called "literate thinking," as they considered alternative views and multiple connections.

For instance, when these at-risk students raised the issue of why Holden Caulfield "doesn't want to try" in school, Laura asked them if they knew anyone like that. Her students considered the possibilities: "he wants to be noticed"; his parents don't "really care"; he's "putting on a big act"—"he's already labeled, so he figures he'll live up to that." Together they examined whether Holden was "normal," and found problematic contradictions between what he did and what he seemed to feel. The pull of genuine conversation and the spark of their puzzlements spurred student response and thinking.

Laura made sure her at-risk students learned how to take their part in such conversations—what theorists call a reader-response approach—responding, questioning, connecting literature to their experiences, to their feelings, and to the world. As she focused on what students had to say about what they read, she learned "how exciting it is to see their understanding develop from themselves."

Drawn into dialogues of meaning-making and problem-posing, these students began to create new images of themselves as learners. One student, Kate, the only girl to graduate from her auto repair class at vo tech, had failed ninth- and tenth-grade English, where she told me she sat in the back of the room and "didn't exist to anyone." Kate explained how in Laura's class they talked in "open-minded" ways about books: "We usually get ideas going . . . we always discuss, figure out what's going on, and why it's happening, and what we think will happen." Another failed student, Bret, who later graduated and joined the Navy, said their discussions "always had meaning": "We learn from everybody else's experience as well as our own when we take part." Before heading off to community college, another student, Mark, thanked Laura for transforming him from being illiterate to being "intelligently verbal." Summing up the benefits of their learning and thinking in discussion, Kate said that it "help[ed] me academically and as a person."

**Making Room for Dialogic Teachers**

Classroom dialogue provides an antidote. When students—including those identified as at-risk students—discuss their readings of literature with the support of an encouraging teacher, they can examine what they know, and learn to actively shape, question, elaborate, and remake knowledge. As leaders of departments and at-risk English programs, we need to endorse and sustain those teachers who work to create the space for dialogue and reflection with their students. When students transform their reading in their discussion of texts, they also move toward a personal sense of intellectual self-worth in their new images of themselves as readers, writers, and thinkers. If we want to open students to possibilities in texts and in their lives, we need to encourage our teachers, allowing them room to talk with their students who, as Kate and others sadly remind us, have very likely never heard their own voices in school.

## DO YOU TEACH LEPs OR REAL STUDENTS?

by Darlynn Fink
Clarion University of Pennsylvania

As a teacher of students who have a language other than English as their native language, I am able to select an identity label for these students from a long list of possibilities. One day they may be my ESL students, the next day my ESP class, and the next, my bilinguals. The labels become confusing and often the label itself sounds derogatory. Probably the worst label of all is LEP (pronounced as a word). LEP simply stands for "limited English proficiency," but somehow when someone refers to a student as a LEP, my mind's eye conjures up an image of someone who is maimed or otherwise disfigured—a leper. Perhaps this vision is triggered because the acronym almost sounds like other slang terms used for ridicule, such as *wimp*, *geek*, and *nerd*.

I have wondered how these labels make the students feel, so I asked several to freewrite about being identified as LEPs, etc. One student wrote, "Being a foreign student is a visa for being ashamed." Another said, "You are categorized as being either to [sic] dumb or ignorant to be aware of certain situations going on right under your nose." One girl revealed in the following way

how anxious she becomes when she must speak: "I speak very softly. I do not dare to ask questions. I sweat alot [sic]." While I am sure the labels do not cause all the problems these students experience, I do believe that the labels help to set the students apart, and anything that sets them apart adds to their discomfort.

I am aware that many of the labels were created for convenience as well as to avoid various other terms that could be considered even more derogatory. For example, referring to these students as *foreign* sounds awful, conjuring up images of creatures coming from unknown lands or planets. *Foreign* has been replaced by *international*, a label which is somewhat better, adding a cultural flair to being set apart.

Recently, however, I came across a new label which is probably the ultimate attempt at being nonderogatory and nondiscriminatory. My LEP students are now referred to as REAL students. All along, I thought I was teaching real students in every classroom, regardless of language backgrounds, but now I know that my REAL students are the ones who are considered to be Readers and writers of English as Another Language.

All of this brings me to the conclusion that as educators we cause ourselves all kinds of frustrations that could easily be avoided. Why cannot my students simply be Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Mexican, or German students? If a label must be used, would not an identification with a student's home country and language be less derogatory than some of the other labels we have created? Or even better, could we not just refer to these students simply as students?

## A SILENT CALLING: WHY I CHOSE THIS CAREER

by Ron Goba
Hingham Public Schools, Massachusetts

I don't remember his name. I knew him too many years ago, and over these years, I have learned to use language less for recall and more for invention. That happens as one gets older. Some things I want to block, even blot; some things I lose when I try to make the familiar strange. Other things I lose to onset feebleness.

But I remember him: His meek face that sprouted a halo when he smiled, the way he could light a room, ignite a warmth in the pit of my gut; his awkward walk, a slow hunched wobble that seemed always to threaten a fall, but meant ineffable patience; the baked-on blueness of his Future Farmers of America jacket which he wore like a habit he didn't want to break, proud as a peacock he probably never saw; the hard moral vision in his otherwise soft eyes, the strength of innocence that made me want to take him home as my son. Yet, when he spoke, when he dared to let out a word, when the shyness lost to risk. The spasmodic fragments of sound. The bits of broken words in the interminable sentence. The stumbling. The faltering. The incalculable pauses. The sibilants. The mangled gulps. His cross to bear: THE STUTTER.

I was his teacher then, the day he came to me with a special project. This was the year he would have to participate in the Future Farmers of America annual oratorical contest. Barely seventeen, and already he faced Agamemnon's dilemma: Give the dreaded speech, or give up your membership in the club that's an integral part of your life. At seventeen, you can do anything. No matter what. Nature's hue can hold; the gold can stay. At seventeen, you know it. You just do. He decided to speak.

Future Farmers of America was just that, a school club in Lyman Memorial Junior-Senior High School in Lebanon, Connecticut, a school where in season a number of students arrived tardy for classes because their higher calling involved early morning farm chores.

Future Farmers of America students were peanut butter and jelly kids, nose to the grindstone, back to the wheel. While most of them did not enjoy academic work, they did not shun it. They'd just rather work with dirt. Dig into earth. Plant something. Get some sweat on your brow. Toughen flesh. Make it all grow. The old-fashioned way. Earn it. Roots in a rumpled brown bag. While merely kids, they respected work. They did it because that's what you do: You do it. He was like that. In abundance.

I don't remember what he wrote. I remember how difficult it was for him to put down on paper what he wanted to say. The weeks of starts and stops, the ebb and flow of fumbling, of smiling through veiled tears, of that sheepishly clumsy but mulishly struggling desire to get it done.

He gave his word. His word was gold. He made his choice. His choice was golden. The club said give the speech. The club opened its arms to him. Took him in. He belonged. He wanted to. It meant he was one of them, not just one. Somehow, in the way the grace of God touches a Gimpel the Fool, he got it done. He wrote the speech.

I remember the practices, but I don't remember what we did. What we said. I heard the stutter. That awful stutter. The way it tried to stop him. I wept inside. Bawled uncontrollably when I got home. Told my wife, who understands with her heart. She held my hands when we talked. Got me to unclench my fists. Fed her warmth through my fingers, my palms, my veins. Took my mind off the Old Testament God. The one that lets stutters happen. The one that could crush a child for a parable, a proverb. She got me through it. Helped me to see. His energy. His persistence. His humility. His pellucid simplicity, the beauty, the splendor. The incredible way the boy ignored what wore me down. The work of conscience. The sheer plod to persevere. To transform, defeat the stutter. To do it. To make me see a way. To make me listen; help. Hold on.

He was human. He thought of quitting. I remember. He cried. Not a snivel. Not a whine. Not concealed this time. Just real, hard, head-down, slumped-body wailing. Exhausted from climbing. From trying to soar. From the impediment that blocked the flow of words. The exasperation of, the granite weight of, the overwhelming grief of the stutter. Of doing it.

I hugged him that time. I had never hugged a student before outside a locker room, a football field, a gym. That was a coach-in-bonding, a coach signaling approval, encouragement, appreciation. This was different. This was a teacher to a student. A parent to child. Father to son. This was a classroom. He seemed so helpless. In a bind he couldn't break. The rope taut on his tongue. The body so slack it seemed the air itself was holding him up. Seeing this. Sensing him about to fall. Knowing that this falling could last, leave a mark in space for life. Failing at what we want so much does that. Failing to overcome does that. Failing to want less does that. All such failing is failing on self. I wanted to catch him. Stop him from failing. From falling. I hugged him. I remember. He stopped falling.

He gave the speech. It was a competition. He lost. But he didn't fail.

I am going to retire in 1991, after thirty-three years. I don't know why I remember him. I'm glad I do. He means more to me than I mean to myself. A teacher's sacred, holy moment. A treasured gift of shared presence. The rare reasons we do this stuff called education. A time spent in grace that lasts as memory. That feeds the will. A silent calling. A precious answer. Faith. Trust. The mute sound of brute love.

When I read between the lines of what I've written here, I discover something I like about such students. What his ingenuousness yet does to me. The way it lives inside. Its efficacy. Why I chose this career. Or, thank my lucky stars, it chose me.

# Software Review

### "DO IT YOURSELF"

by Wendy Paterson
Buffalo State College, New York

Today you can get a self-help book for just about anything—plumbing, electrical wiring, carpentry. Self-help is cheaper, faster, and more fun than paying exorbitant amounts for so-called "experts" to do it, as long as you don't set yourself on fire, or carelessly cut off a part of your anatomy. So, as you marvel at the proliferation of writing software on the market written by "experts," think about self-help and create your own software.

We often complain about drawbacks to commercially produced software packages, specifically the constraints of single keystroke responses and rigid text. We know students are able to enter boundless responses and to shape those responses into essays when they use a word processor. The same vehicle that your students use for demonstration of their writing skills can be used for delivery of your instruction. So why not use word-processed files to create your own software? A word processor can help you deliver your information and guide your students' writing.

I am not a computer programmer. I am not fond of authoring systems. I run the other way when someone tries to explain graphics packages to me. But I am a fiend on the word processor, and I use it as a tool for instruction in my classes. With my apologies to computer programmers, computer-assisted instruction is now as accessible to you as your favorite word-processing program.

To create your own heuristic or guide files, you need only select your best writing exercises, set up some appropriate questions, or commit to disk your now presently mimeographed assignments. Ray and Dawn Rodrigues call such files "lesson files" (after Stephen Marcus), and you'll probably want to read their self-help book, *Teaching Writing with a Word Processor, Grades 7–13* (1986; Urbana, IL: NCTE/ERIC).

At Buffalo State College we have had several professors produce "homemade" text files to do a variety of things: help students read chapter texts with greater understanding; show students typical test questions; give students re-usable formats for repetitive reports. One instructor created a program called "Read and Respond" to assist our students in college reading and study skills. He used selections of college texts from a variety of subjects, splitting them into component paragraphs. The program guides students to respond to each paragraph using several different approaches: summarizing, questioning, and taking notes. This program allows each student to receive minimal instruction and practice maximum demonstration of written interaction with textual material without artificial constraints usually associated with programmed computer-assisted instruction.

Using word processing, I have had my students type in text from short articles which we then manipulate in written interactions. I have had great success with students separating paragraphs and inserting three responses: writing a summary statement, asking a question that the reading raises, and forming a reaction to the ideas engendered. This type of activity allows me to monitor their thoughts much like a recorded conversation. It also models the idea that writing provides an interactive response to reading.

Does this sound like a workbook on a screen? Not really. When you begin to teach writing online, you see a different classroom dynamic emerge. Conference-centered writing becomes not only a possibility, but a necessity. You respond and evaluate each piece of writing individually. Yet, how many times have you had to repeat the same thing? Committing your advice or directions to a word-processed file may be a valuable alternative to guide your students' writing. And perhaps because the word-processing screen is so self-absorbing, your students may find setting up text files more effective than asking them to switch their concentration from paper to screen, or blackboard to screen, as they work through an assignment.

You may consider what models, heuristics, or exercises you would like to commit to disk. Choose your word-processing software for comfort, not for style (like a good pair of running shoes), and do it yourself.

# Book Review

### *LEARNING DENIED* BY DENNY TAYLOR

by Kathleen Strickland
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

As taxpayers, and certainly as educators, we are under the general impression that all the children in this country are afforded the same opportunities for education through our public school system. And furthermore, as educators, we believe that this system is primarily interested in the welfare of children and the rights that they have as unique individuals and learners. In Denny Taylor's new book, *Learning Denied*, published this year by Heinemann Educational Books, she brings us face to face with a reality that should upset and shock those who hold these beliefs about our educational system.

In this story/report, Taylor tells of two parents, Claudia and Pat, who only want what is best for their son, Patrick, and who find themselves caught up in a battle with the bureaucracy of the special education division of a public school. As concerned parents, at first they turn to the school for advice and guidance, but in the end they try desperately to protect their son from this same system, even resorting to legal means to do so.

Taylor, in true qualitative-researcher style, devotes the first half of the book to outlining the course of events in Patrick's school life, from the beginning of kindergarten through the next two grades. Patrick's parents were informed of an early diagnosis of perceptual difficulties on a preschool screening test. A few months later, his kindergarten teacher pointed to motor skill difficulties evidenced in not cutting straight with scissors, and Taylor documents the extent to which the school goes to confirm their diagnosis of a suspected disability. Over the next two years, Patrick is subjected to a battery of tests that do little more than prove to this six-year-old that something is wrong with him. These tests discourage Patrick to the point where he stops trying to read in school. In sharp contrast, during this same time at home, Patrick continues reading and writing and, in private tutoring lessons, is able to compose stories, is able to choose increasingly difficult stories to read, and is able to discuss what he is reading and writing in the way that real readers and writers do. None of Patrick's out-of-school evidence is even considered in the school's diagnosis; Patrick's abilities are assessed only by test scores and by

reports from "experts" who have each met with Patrick only once in clinical situations.

The power of *Learning Denied* lies in Taylor's detailed reporting of the events. As I read, I was amazed and at the same time horrified, at the power that standardized testing has over the educational fate of young children, even despite the research of the past twenty years proving the limitations of such tests. And as a teacher, I recognize that Patrick's fate is not unusual. How often have each of us witnessed a student caught in the "system" and felt powerless to change the inevitable outcome? Patrick's case is unusual only because Patrick's parents fought the system. His parents knew what their son was capable of and what he could do outside the school situation, and they fought to protect their son's rights as a learner and as an individual.

I know there are many in education who have seen the injustices and inequities in the system and are working hard for change. *Learning Denied* is a powerful book that can help make a difference. It is a book that needs to be shared with other teachers, administrators, parents, and those who sit on "committees for the handicapped." Patrick is now learning at home, having been denied a public school education, yet this has probably saved him. There are too many Patricks out there who will not be as fortunate. Instead, they will know by the time they are eight or nine years old that they are unable to learn, and they will undoubtedly wait in frustration until their sixteenth birthday when they can legally escape a system that has denied them their right to learn.

# Reviews in Brief

### LOST IN THE CROWD

With a pamphlet and informational packet, NCTE is calling attention to the continuing problem of outsized classes and workloads for teaching English and the language arts in the nation's secondary schools. Titled "Lost in the Crowd," these materials explain how reducing the number of students per teacher opens up possibilities for more individual attention and more effective teaching approaches.

The materials were developed by members of NCTE's Secondary Section Steering Committee, headed by Secondary Section Chair Jackie E. Swensson of Meritt Hutton Junior High School, Thornton, Colorado. The NCTE Board of Directors recently approved a policy that calls on school districts and states to adopt plans to reduce class sizes for English language arts to not more than 20 students and workloads to not more than 80 students per teacher in junior and senior high schools. The Board of Directors also voted to work for passage of legislation mandating the reductions in the states.

The 20/80 formula represents further reduction from NCTE's long-standing policy favoring class sizes of 25 and workloads of 100 students for teaching English and the language arts in secondary schools.

The "Lost in the Crowd" pamphlet notes that to help students become actively involved with learning, teachers today can't simply present information; they must coach students in using information for complex purposes. It points out that a teacher with 125 students who spends only 20 minutes critiquing each student's paper must spend nearly 42 hours responding to *each* assignment.

The pamphlet lists research findings about the gains in teacher-student contact, interaction for learning, and classroom climate that become possible with smaller classes. It calls for staff development efforts to help teachers adopt the broader range of methods made possible by smaller classes. And it suggests steps that school districts can take, over a five-year period, to work toward such reductions.

The secondary class size packet, *Lost in the Crowd: A Handbook on Class Size and Teacher Workload* consists of NCTE position statements; strategies for working at the local level, with news media, and state legislators; plus a range of background materials, some in pamphlet form.

For a single copy of the "Lost in the Crowd" pamphlet, send a business-sized, stamped, self-addressed envelope with your request to Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Multiple copies may be purchased for $7.00 per 100.

The secondary class size packet, *Lost in the Crowd: A Handbook on Class Size and Teacher Workload*, is a plastic-wrapped, 3-hole punched document, and carries the NCTE stock number 42915-0015. NCTE members may purchase the packet for $7.50; nonmembers for $9.95. Send your request, with a check or money order payable to NCTE, to the NCTE Fulfillment Department, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. (Include $1.35 postage and handling for the first item; $0.65 for each additional item.)

### GUIDELINES FOR A GENDER-BALANCED CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH

NCTE's Committee on Women in the Profession has developed a position statement, "Guidelines for a Gender-Balanced Curriculum in English, Grades 7–12." The pamphlet urges teachers and curriculum planners to balance the curriculum by integrating literature by and about women into courses taught at the junior high and high school levels. It offers ideas for developing a gender-balanced curriculum and suggests works to teach.

"Role models in books, as in life, help female and male students shape their own experience," the committee states. "Balancing the curriculum allows all students to see themselves as doers and thinkers and as persistent and successful."

The document is based on an article in the October 1989 *English Journal* by Margaret Anne Zeller Carlson of Conval Regional High School, Peterborough, New Jersey. Her article, which carries the same name as the pamphlet, suggests that teachers include selections by women four times a year; introduce a woman's work along with a man's work; experiment with narrative writing; look closely at the video selections used in English courses; put gender balance on the agenda for departmental meetings; involve principals in the selection process; form an all-school committee to concentrate on the issue; write other organizations for assistance; and invite knowledgeable women writers or critics to speak about women's literature. A selected list of over 100 recommended books by or about women is included, as well as a list of resource materials.

"Guidelines for a Gender-Balanced Curriculum in English, Grades 7–12" is available from NCTE. For a free copy, send your request with a business-sized, stamped, self-addressed envelope to Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Multiple copies may be purchased for $7.00 per 100.

### RELEASED INTO LANGUAGE

It's time for colleges to rethink the way they teach creative writing to undergraduates, says poet and fiction writer Wendy Bishop, director of freshman English at Florida State University. In *Re-*

*leased into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing*, she proposes refocusing such introductory courses away from products and toward processes. This change, she contends, helps undergraduates find out what real writers do, from capturing the germ of an idea to final editing. The approach is equally valid for teaching below the college level.

Bishop notes that the workshop method, famed for developing many of today's big-name writers, was designed to help graduate students already involved in writing learn from published authors. But she insists it does not help novices from diverse backgrounds, whose reasons for "wanting to know if they can write" are equally diverse, who are unsure of themselves and at the mercy of myths about writing and writers, "seduced by the image of greatness, repelled by the demands of the craft, and often terrified of sharing their work."

The idea of freeing this mass of students to work at using language for their own purposes is revolutionary in academe, Bishop points out. Instead, focusing on those most skilled with the English language has been the rule. She sketches historical and political developments that have created divisions within the teaching of English, and suggests that creative writing teachers can learn from the writing-process concepts now making headway among teachers of just plain "composition."

"We need to move beyond critique and begin to institute more productive practices," Bishop declares. Most important, she says, the teacher must believe in the potential of all writing students and in the importance of what could be their only opportunity to "get in touch with who they are."

Bishop analyzes the kinds of writing done in classes in literature, language-based composition, traditional writing workshops, and her own introductory creative writer's workshop. Drawing on James Britton's research in the purposes for writing, she notes the differing amounts of course time devoted to exploratory writing (for example: journals, brainstorming), instrumental writing (essays, analysis), and imaginative writing (poetry, fiction, etc.).

In place of the traditional creative writing workshop's emphasis (90 percent imaginative writing, 10 percent exploratory, and no instrumental writing) she devotes 30–40 percent of course time to journals, notebooks, and exploratory drafts; 20–30 percent to analysis of the craft of writing, "Why I Write" and "How I Write" essays, imitations of other writers, etc.; and 30–40 percent to imaginative writing in all creative genres.

Bishop explains how she uses peer groups, collaboration, interviews with writers, oral reports, in-class writing to various stimuli, and variations on the teacher lecture to help students learn to get in motion with actual writing and understand how their minds work when engaged in the creative process. She suggests ways to use insights into the writing process from professional writers, and once students have begun to write, how to develop techniques for self-evaluation that don't stifle their creativity.

Bishop devotes an entire chapter to activities that help spark invention, the most neglected element in the traditional writing workshop. She offers a wealth of examples of exercises and student responses. And she insists on portfolios as part of a "multimodal" evaluation focused on information the writer can use.

(*Released into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing* by Wendy Bishop. 233 pages, paperbound. Price: $15.95; NCTE members, $12.50. ISBN: 0-8141-3988-4. LC: 90-48879. Audience: teachers of writing in colleges and secondary schools, teacher educators. Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Stock No. 39884-0015.)

## WHAT IS ENGLISH?

Peter Elbow's book about the historic Coalition of English Associations Conference is now off the press, published jointly by the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. *What Is English?* is one eminent teacher/writer's personal, informal synthesis and interpretation of the most inclusive think-tank session ever held by the English teaching profession.

This three-week conclave at Wye Woods Conference Center, Maryland, brought together key university faculty in literature, writing, and English education with outstanding community college and secondary school teachers of English and elementary language arts teachers. Sixty of them talked, wrote, and ruminated on contemporary issues in the teaching of English, as well as appropriate aims for the profession, on the eve of a new century.

Elbow's lively account, laced with anecdotes and observations from teacher participants, gives readers a keen sense of what it was like to take part in this unprecedented dialogue, which produced a strong consensus on many key issues, across teaching levels and sectors of the discipline. It serves as an encouragement to further interaction and cooperative effort to explain English teaching to policymakers and the public.

How best to help students learn and what is important to learn from English and language arts classes today were the key questions these teachers wrestled with at all hours through twenty-one steamy days in July 1987 on Chesapeake Bay. Elbow shows how a consensus emerged—that the study of English should center on helping students become habitual writers, readers, and interpreters of language, using it to construct meaning, seek understanding, "make up their own minds," and actively participate in a democratic society.

Elbow recounts how guests Chester A. Finn (then of the U.S. Department of Education) and E. D. Hirsch, with their insistence that teachers create a list of "core" literature and cultural information all students should know, helped spark that consensus. "[Hirsch] kept refusing to talk about intensive learning or learning for understanding. He kept stressing nothing but terms and information," Elbow observes. Conferees, he adds, saw in Finn's and Hirsch's concepts an effort to narrow the national culture at a time when Americans need to understand and coexist amid diversity.

In further chapters, Elbow talks about how the participants arrived at a "fuzzy yet important . . . agreement that theory is a central and unifying focus for English studies"—a consensus that calls on teachers and students not only to understand others' theories but to construct their own. He explores the implications of a theoretical stance for teachers, noting conferees' conclusion "that an emphasis on theory leads naturally to an activist interest in changing how we teach and how schools function." Further observations: because practice is a potential source of new theory, it should be respected and studied.

The question of literature "was left strikingly moot," Elbow observes, saying he saw "remarkable depth of uncertainty in the profession about the notion of a canon of works securely defined as better or more important." But he finds the profession committed to "stretching ourselves"—and presumably students—by reading *Moby Dick* instead of Donald Duck. Literature, he adds, is "what people get passionate about (a weird but interesting way to define what *literary* means)."

Additional chapters focus on writing (and the problems between literature and writing camps in the profession), on goals for teaching English, on the national preoccupation with testing, and

on conferees' concerns and questions about common assumptions and working conditions within the profession. For teachers at all levels, Elbow's book provides a sense of collegiality and an invitation to think and talk about what they consider important in their work and why.

*What Is English?* is available from NCTE. (271 pages, paperbound. Price: $12.50; NCTE members, $10.00. ISBN: 0-87352-382-2. LC: 90-44931. NCTE Stock No. 56657-0015.)

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS—PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are welcomed. Inquiries about guest editorship of an issue are encouraged. In particular upcoming issues will have these themes:

October 1991 (July 1 deadline):
**The Changing Literature Classroom**

December 1991 (September 15 deadline):
**Real Evaluation: Testing, Assessing, and Measuring Student Performance**

February 1992 (November 1 deadline):
**Reading and Writing Connections**

May 1992 (February 1 deadline):
**Literacy: The Crisis Mentality**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy.

Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326.


### CEL Executive Committee

**Chair**
Myles Eley
Warren Central High School
9500 East 16th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46229

**Associate Chair**
Paul C. Bellin
Weld County School District #6
811 15th Street
Greeley, CO 80631

**Past Chair**
Wendell Schwartz
Stevenson High School
1670 West Highway 22
Prairie View, IL 60069

**Liaison to NCTE Secondary Section Committee**
Mary Sue Gardetto
Ankeney Junior High School
4085 Shakertown Road
Beavercreek, OH 45430

**Corresponding Secretary**
Susan Hayles-Berbower
Huntington Beach UHSD
10251 Yorktown Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

**Membership Chair**
Mary Ellen Thornton
Patrick Henry Middle School
Houston, TX 77093

**Secretary-Treasurer/ Staff Liaison**
Miles Myers
NCTE

**Members-at-Large**
Susan Benjamin
Highland Park High School
433 Vine
Highland Park, IL 60035

Kristina M. Elias
West Hartford Public Schools
West Hartford, CT 06117

Thomas Fischer
Lyons Township High School
100 S. Brainard Avenue
LaGrange, IL 60525

Ira Hayes
Syosset High School
South Woods Road
Syosset, NY 11791

Daniel A. Heller
Brattleboro Union High School
Brattleboro, VT 05301

Deborah Smith McCullar
Dean Morgan Junior High School
1440 S. Elm
Casper, WY 82601



**ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY**
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
Champaign, Illinois
Permit No. 85




BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*Leadership for Excellence*

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

**Conference on English Leadership**

Volume 13, Number 3
October 1991
Editor: James Strickland

## In This Issue

### THE CHANGING LITERATURE CLASSROOM

by James Strickland, editor

Many of us could echo the sentiments of the authors in this issue: We did well in our high school English classes, earning top grades, and yet we learned little and remember less about the literature we read. We went into the profession not so much because of the great literature as we did because of a great teacher. And we were the good students. But what about the rest of the class, those who endured the lectures, the questions at the end of each section, the quizzes and major tests? Each of us swore, upon entering the profession, to do something different, something to touch our students, something to make the literature come alive for them. Yet, weekly magazines and newspapers headline stories about our continuing failure. The authors in this issue present new views and solutions that contradict those stories.

Bill Williams, a colleague in the English department at Slippery Rock, in his doctoral dissertation, questioned the very notion of "literature" (a dissertation of which Stanley Fish personally requested a copy). In "Teaching Literature, Canon Formation, and Multiculturalism," he questions the practice of giving token recognition to multiculturalism while clinging to the belief that cultural literacy equals a knowledge of the traditional great works of literature.

Jody Price, a teacher at Stonehill College in Massachusetts, explores the ways that critical theory, especially feminist theory, can breathe new life into an "intro to lit" class. As she explains in "Feminism and the Reconstitution of Family," her students examine the concept of "family" as it is portrayed in 19th- and 20th-century literature, reading the literature as more than examples of historical periods and genres.

When my daughter's classmates wanted to know how she was able to do so well on the weekly quizzes in a senior "lit" class, she answered simply, "I read the books." A sad truth is that many students do not like to read. They probably would have at one time, but the education system exorcised the enjoyment of reading in favor of curricular objectives. John Wilson Swope, an assistant professor at the University of Northern Iowa, sees the teaching of literature changing as a generation of readers, students who are whole language learners, show up in our classrooms. He writes about the "Challenges for a Changing Secondary Literature Classroom."

Esther Broughton and Janine Rider, of Mesa State College in Colorado, believe that collaboration is an effective technique for helping students examine literature. The twist they introduce is having their students write as one large group responsible for one paper. They describe the various permutations of what has come to be called "The We-Search Paper." "Herb" Thompson, a frequent contributor from Emory & Henry College in Virginia,

(continued on page 2)

**Inside . . .** **page number**

**Teaching Literature, Canon Formation, and Multiculturalism** . . . . . 2
by William F. Williams
**Feminism and the Reconstitution of Family** . . . . . 3
by Jody Price
**When Whole Language Learners Reach Us: Challenges for a Changing Secondary Literature Classroom** . . . . 6
by John Wilson Swope
**Writing about Literature with Large-Group Collaboration: The We-Search Paper** . . . . . 7
by Esther Broughton and Janine Rider
**Tying Reader Response to Group Interaction in Literature Classrooms** . . . . . 9
by Edgar H. Thompson
**Mr. C. Didn't Do It This Way** . . . . . 10
by E. Carolyn Tucker
**A Convention Guide: Travel Tips and Practical Suggestions** . . . . . 11
by William C. Weber
**Book Review: Michael W. Smith, *Understanding Unreliable Narrators*** . . . . . 12
by Karen Watson
**Software Review: "EDIT!" by McGraw-Hill** . . . . . 13
by Wendy Paterson
**Call for Manuscripts** . . . . . 14
**Announcements** . . . . . 14
**CEL Candidates and Ballot Instructions** . . . . . 15

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

would agree with the collaborative learning and shows the importance of "Tying Reader Response to Group Interaction in Literature Classrooms."

Carolyn Tucker, from a small junior high school in Dixon, Kentucky, writes about the most important change she sees in the literature classroom, her students' insistence upon relevance. She acknowledges that her own teachers may not have taught literature this way, but her students need to see that authors speak to them and their world. She calls her article "Mr. C. Didn't Do It This Way."

Real readers do not read to pass a test; readers read to discover something and share that discovery with people they care about. I guess if we want a nation of readers, we should start treating our students as readers.

This issue also includes William Weber's advice for conventiongoers, a book review by Karen Watson, a software review by Wendy Paterson, and the ballot and biographies of CEL candidates for office.

## TEACHING LITERATURE, CANON FORMATION, AND MULTICULTURALISM

by William F. Williams
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

In the not too distant past, teaching literature meant teaching the traditional canons—the primarily white, male, elitist works of Western civilization—what has been referred to by some as fifteen dead white men and Emily Dickinson. However, over the last twenty years, diverse groups have argued that education should not be culturally exclusive, should not, for example, exclude the cultural productions of females, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and members of lower socioeconomic classes. Culturally underrepresented groups have become increasingly more vocal in their desire to be included in classrooms and textbooks, to the extent that programs of black studies and women's studies have become typical features of our curricular landscape. However, these programs neither satisfy the desires of the culturally underrepresented groups to see their productions canonized nor clarify the role of the traditional literary canons in our classrooms.

### The Cultural Contradiction

Over the past decade, the two strongest voices influencing curricular decisions seem to be contradictory—one insisting on multiculturalism and another insisting on cultural literacy. On the one hand, we are being asked to open our curricula, the "canons" if you will, to the diversity of cultures evidenced in our country. On the other hand, we are being asked to see to it that our students are literate, not in a general sense of literacy, but literate in relation to a particular culture for the sake of efficiency and homogeneity. The problem is whether we can justify, in light of multicultural awareness, canonizing one group of cultural productions, insisting as we do so that to be considered literate, to receive a degree from one of our universities, and to hold a prestigous job requires exposure to what has been called "The High Art" of Western civilization.

In "Roll Over Beethoven," Edward Rothstein argues against what he sees as "the tremendous energy of multiculturalism, which now reigns in universities, on public television stations, and in arts organizations" (*The New Republic* [February 1991], p. 32). He views the movement toward multiculturalism as decay, as movement away from rationality and the accomplishments of the West. Rothstein allows that other cultures should be given a voice in popular media, yet he feels that universities and federal monies should be reserved for the high art of Western civilization—Literature with a capital L. Of course, Rothstein never addresses the problem of defining Western culture. He seems to assume that it is a body of works about which all "right" thinking people would agree.

Rothstein, in fact, is just one of many who argue for a common culture, a culture taught by exposing all students to a certain group of works. For example, Irving Howe argues against multiculturalism in "The Value of the Canon," a February 1991 article that appeared in an edition of *The New Republic* focusing on the problems of multiculturalism. Howe is concerned that the insurgents as he calls them—feminists, black activists, Marxists, and deconstructionists—will seriously undermine education by "introducing material from Third World cultures and thinning out an already thin sampling of Western writing" (p. 40). Howe insists that "we should want students to read such writers so that they may learn to enjoy the activity of mind, the pleasure of forms, the beauty of language—in short, the arts in their own right" (p. 41). And who are the writers to whom Howe refers? "Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke, Nietzsche and Freud, Marx and Mill, Jefferson and Dewey" (p. 43). Arguably each of the writers he names is worthy of study, but the group does seem to be exclusively dead white men. Both Rothstein and Howe would agree with Norman Podhoretz's attempt to justify the humanities canon:

> One [justification] . . . is the creation of a common culture. . . . I believe very strongly that there is a canon: that is, that some books are better than others, that some books are great and some books are not and that we know, on the whole, what the [great books] are. . . . I don't have the slightest doubt that there is such a canon, that over the generations one generation has instructed the other in what the canon is, and until ideologically motivated attacks on the idea of the canon arose from within the world of the humanities itself, no one, I think, doubted the existence of that canon of Matthew Arnold's "the best that has been thought and said." (Excerpt from "The Humanities and the Public Interest: A Symposium." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* [1987], 1, 184)

### The Other Side

At the same symposium where Podhoretz expressed his confidence in a canon composed of the best that has been thought and said, Jonathan Culler voiced what he saw as a problem in canon selection: "Much of the most interesting work in the fields of the humanities has involved critiques of foundationalist and universalist claims. . . . We have been made aware of what has been left out when the best that has been thought and written is selected or when the discussion focuses on 'man'" (pp. 186–187).

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy where such endorsement is clearly specified. Copyright for articles published in *English Leadership Quarterly* reverts to the respective authors.

*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

There are others like Gerald Graff and William Cain who are less willing to attempt to enforce such a narrow view of literary studies. Unlike the conservative position represented by Rothstein, Howe, and Podhoretz, one maintaining both the notion of a canon and the exclusiveness of the traditional canon, Graff and Cain argue for teaching not the canon but the conflicts, suggesting the course be "named Canons in Conflict" ("Peace Plan for the Canon Wars," *National Forum* LXIX, 3 [1989], 9). In the course they would have students examine the current division between high and low culture. "How did a work like *Moby Dick*, which as late as the 1920s was shelved under 'cetology,' 'travel,' or 'adventure,' become a classic of 'literature,' " they ask, "whereas *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* did not" (p. 9)? Is Podhoretz's implied response, "some books are great and some are not," really a satisfactory answer? Is it possible to argue, as Podhoretz does, that attacks on the canon are ideologically motivated, while maintaining that canon selection or canon formation is ideologically neutral?

D. C. Heath and Company addressed the problem of canon exclusiveness by publishing a two-volume anthology of American literature, attempting to retain the "classics" as well as include writers who may not have been anthologized in the past because of gender, race, class, and/or political reasons. The attempt resulted in a 5,450–page anthology with feminists, African Americans, Chinese Americans—and a corresponding section of criticism. Peter Shaw, vice-president of the National Association of Scholars, claims that Heath included works of minor literary importance in an attempt to be politically correct. James Tuttleson, a New York University English professor, said that "these massive anthologies make it possible for anyone with any kind of ideological ax to grind to seriously shortchange students who, in my view, should be asked to read only the greatest and the best." Critics of the Heath anthology argue from the assumption that the traditional canon is ideologically neutral and that the process that decides which are the "great books" is not politically motivated.

Arguments about the best and greatest are based on spurious notions of literary merit, claims resting on fairly ill-defined concepts or unexamined assumptions, such as literary language or eternal verities. First, it becomes obvious that literary device is not a defining feature of literature because devices such as metaphor are features of all language acts. Second, the notion of eternal verities ignores the situatedness of all discourse, evidenced by the notion that history is always written under the sign of a current problem. Michel Foucault persuades us that truth is culturally determined and discipline specific. One cannot speak the truth but only in the truth—a concept that is both social and historical, not eternal (*The Archaeology of Knowledge & Discourse on Language*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972, p. 224). Stanley Fish conceives of literature (with a small l) as a set of works or conventions that a community of readers agrees to call literature. The current move toward multiculturalism suggests that literature has changed because the community of readers has changed, a change acknowledged and enabled by the new Heath anthology. Our universities no longer admit only the sons of the privileged class. Sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers of a wide variety of socioeconomic classes attend, people not always ready or willing to focus on the traditional canon and ignore their own heritage. The interest shown by administration, faculty, students, and publishers in including works by non-white, non-male, and non-Western writers indicates a desire to empower previously disenfranchized members of our nation. As I see it, the real problem with deciding which canon to teach really involves whether to teach any canon at all.

Literacy and empowerment require people to join a discourse community, and it seems that our concern should be getting students into that discourse community, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In fact, the idea of students and faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds joining in discourse seems far more exciting than preserving someone else's reactionary idea of "the best that has been written and spoken." Preserving a particular group of texts tends to privilege either the culture represented in the texts or place the discourse outside the reach of the student who is not a member of the privileged culture.

A goal of the New York State Regents is that high school students "develop the ability to understand, respect and accept people of different races; sex; cultural heritage; national origin; religion; and political, economic and social background, and their values, beliefs, and attitudes." If we do not give a voice to people of different races, sex, and cultural heritage, we cannot commit ourselves to teaching understanding, respect, and acceptance of others. One way to give a voice is by canonizing works by different people. Another way is to re-examine our notion of canon. Gregory S. Jay argues that "the power of a text to move a reader is a culturally produced effect—that literary 'taste' is not natural but taught, and taught in a way that reproduces values that go beyond aesthetics" ("The End of 'American' Literature: Toward a Multicultural Practice," *College English* 53 [1991] 278). Jay ends his essay by challenging his fellow educators, "Teachers have the responsibility to empower previously marginalized texts and readers, and to teach in a way that we risk surprising and painful changes in the interpretive habits, expectations, and values of our students—and of ourselves. . . . In teaching students to value other cultures and other world views we necessarily draw them with us into conflicts with the dominant culture that has produced and sustained our identities and which has the power to enforce its opinions as law" (p. 279).

Perhaps the real debate is not whether to expand the canon to include formerly ignored works, but whether the entire notion of a canon has any educational validity in our literature classrooms.

## FEMINISM AND THE RECONSTITUTION OF FAMILY

by Jody Price
Stonehill College, North Easton, MA

In questioning the teaching the "Great Truths and Works" reinforcing the social values of middle-class white males in Western culture, I discovered the writings of other women and men who advocated liberatory teaching—Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and many feminist pedagogues, such as Paula Treichler, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Catharine Stimpson. Contemporary feminist theory creates a liberatory classroom in one of the most difficult places to effect this kind of change, the "Introduction to Literature" course. Liberation education—the meaningful exchange of ideas about our culture and our role within it—can occur for both student and teacher through choice of topic around which to organize all the information which "must" be transmitted; through commitment to a political position; through a careful choice of texts which are provocative for all members of the class; and through innovative teaching techniques. That discovery revitalized my work in the classroom, for there I discovered the students and I could discuss the injustices and inequities of our culture, while exploring ways to redefine and reconstruct society.

One of the more exciting topics I have used in the "Introduction to Literature" course is that of "Family." Challenging the sanctity of the traditional family is a risky undertaking in this age of

political conservatism, an ideology built on the importance of certain values coming from the structure of that family. However, the topic of family challenges and expands our limited notion of this social unit, allowing us to explore the injustices of our culture, which excludes so many from being acknowledged as family—some excluded because of sexual orientation, race, or economic class, considerations making them inadequate providers or role models for children; others excluded for creating alternative lifestyles to those accepted within society. We discuss why some texts, like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* or Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, have usually been excluded from the dominant list of "great works," and how the precepts for such exclusion can also be applied to entire groups of people living on the fringes of society. When the students confront their notion of what comprises family, they begin to understand the inequity of a social system which forces so many lives into a marginal existence, leading students to make political choices during their lives to eventually effect change and create a more inclusive culture.

As we go through the syllabus during the first class, I initiate discussion and define the focus of the course by asking: Why do you think most of us have read *Huck Finn* in high school, while so few have read Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* or Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*? Why do so many giggle, or squirm in their chairs, when I mention gay and lesbian lifestyles? What is a meaningful family? Does sexual orientation have anything to do with creating a meaningful family? Why does a woman leaving her children continue to cause such animosity against her? I hope the critical process we begin to use on that first day will be carried on by the students into their other classes, into their majors, and into their lives.

**My Influences**

As my personal reading continues, the list of works redefining my life and my teaching grows as well—Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow, and Catharine MacKinnon, to name a few. If it is appropriate to our discussions, I share with my students what I have been reading and why that reading enlightens a certain idea or passage for me. I encourage them to perhaps read the same text at their leisure, or simply read outside of class, as a way of fostering their own intellectual/spiritual/emotional growth.

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982) allowed me to see for the first time that my life, depending so heavily on friendships, family, and connections, was a life of strength and not feminine weakness, an existence providing a place of growth not only for me, but for those around me. This concept, almost a cliche in feminist thought, the "web of relationships" (p. 32) as an alternative to a male hierarchy, is the basis of my commitment in the introduction to literature course. The students and I discuss how success in maintaining relationships in all kinds of contexts—what some disparage as women's "failure to separate" (p. 9) from connections with other people—is a way of reconstituting family. Because women "are more likely than men to believe that, ideally, all activity should lead to an increased emotional connection with others" (Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Boston: Beacon, 1986, p. 39), we discuss the connectedness between women and women, women and children, and the connectedness between all lives, in spite of differences.

Such "emotional connectedness" with others rejects much that patriarchy defines as "natural": the importance of competition, success, and the impersonal voice; the importance of individualism; the corresponding unimportance of women's and children's lives, and empathetic connection. Thus, what the dominant ideology defines as the "natural" family immediately becomes suspect as well. Some questions we ask in our investigation of the concept of family include: Does the family mean only the personal world of the mother and children and the public world of the father? Must that public world have dominance over all other experience? Should the mother who works be forced into the values of the public world, oftentimes denying and rejecting her own valued experience of connection and relationships? Does the dominant world of the heterosexual father necessarily make the family created by gays and lesbians "unnatural" and "perverted"?

The concept of equal parenting changes our ideas about who is a capable parent, in spite of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or economic status. Nancy Chodorow insists that if men and women were capable of equal parenting, thereby changing the roles of men and women within the framework of the traditional family, notions of masculinity "would not become tied to denial of dependence and devaluation of women" (*The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California, 1978, p. 218).

Finally, Catharine MacKinnon identifies the inaccessiblity of feminist theory, and critical theory as well, as a crucial problem for our students and the culture as a whole ("Desire and Power: A Feminist Perspective." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988). She says quite rightly: "We purport to want to change things, but we talk in ways that no one understands" (p. 105). Feminists must be able to speak in a language which reveals their commitment to social transformation and is understood within the classroom. As feminists, we cannot celebrate the importance of personal experience and connection with others, while speaking in a language of code and jargon, one signifying elitism. Therefore, the introduction to literature course is a place to share our political commitments and a place to test the accessibility of our language.

The methods by which these ideas make their way into the classroom is a continuing process for me. A constant challenge is how to provide an environment for students to become "their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture" (Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Boston: South End, 1980, p. 48). I depend upon a variety of texts chosen from inside and outside the canon which best reflect my commitment to feminism and the examples of the families I understand to be innovative, loving, nurturing, and often rejected by our culture. A number of students are challenged enough by the topic and the texts to speak out with some enthusiasm, so that our very traditional classroom is transformed for them and for me into an atmosphere of exchange, enlightenment, and enrichment.

**My Course**

The course I teach is designed as a two-semester requirement, divided by historical periods in order to fulfill one of the course's requirements. The first semester is devoted to nineteenth-century European and American families. In discussing Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," we focus on the speaker's expectation, even insistence, that his male experience also be the experience of his "dear, dear sister," although the traditional reading of this poem has been as a major treatise on British Romanticism. I include information on the lives of both Dorothy and William Wordsworth and we discuss how the life and experiences of the sister/companion become suppressed in what is expected of her by the dominant male figure in her life. This reading of "Tintern" begins a semester-long discussion of the problematic roles of women and men in

the traditional family. Kate Chopin's feminism and support of alternative families in *The Awakening* continues the controversial discussion. Many of my female students are furious at Edna's decision to commit suicide, and their anger is not so much generated by the suicide itself, but by her "desertion" of her children. We talk about why the values of nineteenth-century America continue to maintain such a strong hold and what our assumptions are about a woman's "natural" role in life and her responsibility toward children. We focus on the character of Sissy Jupe in Dickens's *Hard Times*, discussing her subversiveness in disempowering the great strengths of patriarchy and her ability to replace a world of alienation and emotional sterility with one relying upon the heart and connection between people as a place of strength and meaning in a senseless society. A shift to drama allows us to focus on the feminist voice of Oscar Wilde, a gay man whose own marginalized life made him empathetic to the oppression of women. His play *A Woman of No Importance* gives us a glimpse of how little value women actually have in the upper classes of a capitalistic society. Ironically, Lord Illingworth cannot create a duplicate of his despicable self in his "illegitimate" son, who chooses the connection to and devotion of women (his mother and fiancee) over the destructiveness of his father's world. As we finish the semester, it is clear to the students why Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll House* leaves the doting and patronizing Torvald, although the issue of Nora's abandonment of her children surfaces again. Thus, in a century determined to allocate clear and unalterable roles to each gender in the face of religious and social instability, the various texts we read reveal the oppressiveness and divisiveness of many traditional families.

During the second semester we discuss diverse definitions of what constitutes a meaningful family in twentieth-century America, and how groups of people not traditionally acknowledged as family are able to empower their members within a society which has usually excluded them. Lorraine Hansberry's portrait of a woman struggling to keep her family together as the only weapon against a violently racist society in *A Raisin in the Sun* dispels the stereotypes we have of African American adults as negligent and abusive parents. A different reading of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* leads to animated discussions about Tom's right to his own individuality and his commitment/responsibility to the women of his family who are economically and emotionally disempowered, dependent upon him for their very survival. Stephen MacCauley's novel *The Object of My Affection* offers the most controversy as we explore George Murchison's inability to make an emotional commitment to his lover, Paul, and his adopted son, Gabriel, and to a relationship that would push his life to the edge of the dominant culture. Instead, George is tempted to provide a pseudo-traditional family with his roommate and best friend, Nina, who becomes pregnant by her very kind but boring lover, Howard. George's ultimate decision to take the risk and return to Paul generally initiates an enthusiastic acceptance from the students for the family George finally creates. One student even admitted that the novel had changed her belief that homosexuality was a disease and certainly not a lifestyle which would provide a "healthy" environment for a child. We conclude the semester with N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, a moving spiritual account of the link between his life as a Native American in an alienating white culture and the traditions and stories of spiritual journeying left to him as a legacy by his grandmother. In this work, the grandmother empowers her children with a deep devotion to a heritage and history having as its core a belief in the interconnectedness of all life—the very essence of feminist thought.

**The Class Structure**

Along with the use of provocative texts, I also change the physical structure of the class by breaking into small groups. These groups allow the students a "safe space" within the regularly allotted class time in which to discuss their reactions, interpretations, and feelings about the texts. As we meet in small groups every other week, one student is responsible for facilitating the discussion, a role that rotates for each meeting, allowing each student an opportunity to organize a topic or an approach for a certain text. I participate as a member of each group, as best I can. (The social relations of the class never change to the extent that I am ever just "one of the kids"; after all, I do the grading). The discussions of the groups often stray to other issues related to a redefinition of family. Students have had heated discussions about the complexity of assimilation by African Americans in a white culture, the lack of religion in families, and the loss of a male role model in single-mother families. Many views are expressed, some not "politically correct." Yet, there is discussion, exchange, thinking, and many times consensus to a much more inclusive viewpoint than what some students began with.

Individual conferences—a technique that began to help struggling composition students—are a way for us to escape the overpowering intrusion of the academic institution and to come to know one another. Separate meetings outside of the class serve to develop required formal essays, yet talk often strays from the logical construction of an argument and the use of outlines to more informal talk about our texts, the effectiveness of the course, and the role of family in our own lives. I go home exhausted after a day or two of conferences but changed by the shared closeness and the honest exchanges we have about our own families and the families in our books. Some conferences have shown just how relevant our classes are to our lives. For example, a young Chinese woman, unable to return to her family on the coast of China, was greatly impressed by the American determination of Jim in *The Glass Menagerie*. A student whose grandmother insisted on returning to Lebanon to see her remaining children and grandchildren and could not get back was drawn to Lena Younger's strength and commitment to her own family in *A Raisin in the Sun*. A student, whose anger in the classroom was disturbing, revealed in a conference that she comes from an alcoholic family and resists discussing alternative families because she so desperately wants her own traditional family to work.

The warmth we have shared in our conversations often moves back into the large class. Students feel more comfortable participating in discussion. The teacher, no longer a formidable Enemy/Knower, is a kind of quirky woman who enjoys the people she spends time with on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and who is deeply committed to feminism, through which they are often challenged.

**Conclusion**

The majority of the comments in my teaching evaluations are positive, although I am dismayed to find comments like "seems to be sexist toward men" and "too opinionated." Evaluations which say "the class stimulated me to analyze and think" and "discussions were one of the strengths of the class" show that a dialogic, liberatory classroom can be achieved within the constricts of patriarchal academe. Students are willing to discuss issues which inform their own experience, and feminism gives them a new language through which to understand the displacement of many within our culture and to work toward their inclusion.

## WHEN WHOLE LANGUAGE LEARNERS REACH US: CHALLENGES FOR A CHANGING SECONDARY LITERATURE CLASSROOM

by John Wilson Swope
University of Northern Iowa

As secondary English teachers, we need to be aware that students who have been taught to read through a literature-based reading program and a whole language teaching philosophy will soon be sitting in our classrooms. They will bring a wonderful predisposition with them—seeing themselves as readers and active users of language. They are accustomed to selecting and reading books on their own and enjoying themselves while they do it. They use their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills in combination to help them make sense of what they read and write. When they arrive in our secondary literature classrooms, they will challenge us about the literature we teach and how we teach it, and turn to us for new literature and reading strategies.

The first challenge to secondary English teachers will be the extensive range of reading experiences each whole language learner will have. When I began teaching twenty years ago, I often had eighth- or ninth-grade students who admitted that they had never read a whole book on their own. Students who come through a literature-based reading program with a whole language teaching philosophy will have probably read at least a hundred books as part of their elementary experience. Granted, these students will not have read all of the same books; yet, these students have already learned much about literature through their extensive reading. These whole language learners are familiar with various types of literature: poems, myths, fables, stories, novels, and nonfiction. By reading good children's and young adult literature, they have already internalized evaluative criteria for recognizing and selecting good literature. Not only do they have opinions about what good literature is, they already have favorite authors. Whole language learners are as accustomed to recommending good books to friends and teachers as they are to having teachers and peers recommend books to them. As their secondary literature teachers, we must be prepared to recommend other good books to these students when they ask. With young adults, we need to read both the literature written especially for them as well as appropriate works of adult fiction.

A second challenge for us will be that whole language learners view reading, writing, speaking, and listening as communication processes. Like writing, the reading process has identifiable and teachable phases: prereading, during reading, and postreading. Prereading activities help students draw on prior knowledge and organize new information to help them understand a literary work, just as prewriting strategies help students establish a purpose and audience for their writing and gather ideas prior to drafting. During reading, students develop an understanding of the text, exploring the literary form and building upon old and new ideas to gain an overall meaning of the text, similar to the way writing develops in a rough draft. As active readers, students have the opportunity to modify and change their understanding and interpretations of the literature using postreading strategies, in ways comparable to revising and editing when they write. Joseph L. Vaughn and Thomas H. Estes offer a reading process model of anticipation, realization, and contemplation to demonstrate how readers comprehend text and provide specific content area reading strategies for each stage (*Reading and Reasoning Beyond the Primary Grades*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1986). Secondary teachers must embrace a reading process approach to literature and provide the time and strategies that whole language learners have grown to expect and appreciate.

The third challenge is that whole language learners expect to work through their understanding of a work of literature and not be expected to have a precise interpretation from the very beginning. Instead, whole language learners will be used to exploring literature and responding to it in a variety of ways. They are accustomed to sharing their reading with others by responsing to and receiving response from others throughout their reading. As a result, we need to afford students time in class to talk about what they are reading. Although sharing might occur in whole class discussions following the reading of a common piece, students need time to confer and share with each other about independent reading, talking out their interpretations with partners or small groups. We need to listen to what these students have to say when they begin to express an interpretation, encouraging them to return to the text to cite lines or passages that support their interpretations. When we listen and support our students as they come to understand literature, we assume a facilitator's role and move away from providing "the correct answer."

Response journals need to become an important part of the secondary literature program. We need to ask our students to read with a pen or pencil in hand and record their responses either as they read or immediately upon completing the reading. In terms of specific response strategies, David Bleich suggests three types of response: the emotional, the associative, and the figurative (*Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*. Urbana: NCTE, 1975). In keeping a response journal, students are able to respond emotionally, associatively, and figuratively. To elicit an emotional response and explore it briefly, we may ask "how does the literature make you feel, either as you read or immediately upon completing the reading?" and "what in the literature makes you feel this way?" To help students make personal associations with the literature, we may ask them to record three to five events, persons, or experiences that the literature reminds them of as they read. To draw the students back to the text for a closer examination, we may ask them to examine the text for features—words, phrases, motifs, images, sentences—that they believe capture the meaning of the literature. Students also need to be encouraged to record questions they have about the literature as they read and have opportunities to address these questions in large- and small-group sessions. Les Parsons provides a guide to using response journals as the basis for small-group discussions, conferences, and both formative and summative evaluations of student progress, and he includes a variety of cues to prompt the students' responses (*Response Journals*. Portsmouth, NJ: Heinemann, 1990).

A fourth challenge to secondary teachers is to provide opportunities to share literature orally. Whole language learners expect to be read to, and they are accustomed to reading passages aloud as it is appropriate, doing book talks for the purpose of sharing literature, and presenting individual or group oral interpretations of literature. Jim Trelease points out that students' listening comprehension generally exceeds their reading comprehension until students reach the eighth grade (*The New Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin, 1989). Much of the literature we use with high school students may be too difficult for them to comprehend independently but may be comprehended through listening. As a result, we should prepare passages to read aloud to our students, encourage them to prepare and perform selections, and use recordings to share literature orally with them. We need to bring back the oral tradition in our secondary literature classrooms. In this

way, all students can enjoy literature as they improve their reading ability.

Whole language learners may be as close as five years or five months to becoming students in our secondary literature classrooms, depending upon the language arts curriculum of our school districts. As secondary literature teachers, these students will challenge us. They have already integrated their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to assist their reading processes. They have become active participants in their learning and reading. To ignore their experiences as whole language learners risks killing their joy and enthusiasm for literature and conceivably halting their learning altogether. For each student whose experience we confirm, celebrate, and build upon, we retain a life-long reader and learner. We need to be prepared to accept the challenge.

**Appendix: Book Selection Resources**


Richard Abrahamson and Betty Carter (eds.), *Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High Students*. 10th ed. (Urbana: NCTE, 1988).

*ALAN Review*, the publication of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE.

Elizabeth A. Belden and Judy M. Beckman, "Books for Teenage Readers" column in *English Journal*.

James E. Davis and Hazel K. Davis (eds.), *Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students*. 7th ed. (Urbana: NCTE, 1988).

Kenneth L. Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen, annotated booklists in *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. 3rd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1989).

Beverly Kobrin, guidelines for selecting and using comprehended through nonfiction in *Eyeopeners!: How to Choose and Use Children's Books about Real People, Places, and Things*. (New York: Viking, 1988).

William G. McBride (ed.), *High Interest—Easy Reading*. 6th ed. (Urbana: NCTE, 1990).


## WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE WITH LARGE-GROUP COLLABORATION: THE WE-SEARCH PAPER


by Esther Broughton and Janine Rider
Mesa State College, Colorado


On our desk sit the poetry analyses of seventy-three students. Yet we have only four papers to read. How is this possible? It is possible through the use of large-group collaboration, an activity our students affectionately call "the We-search paper."

Although we began using collaborative assignments about literature with the focus on improving writing, we discovered that the greatest benefits come from the multiple insights gained through group exploration of literature. We took our cue from Louise Rosenblatt, who sees the process of reading literature as a "transaction" in which both reader and text are modified (*Literature as Exploration*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1938). If a transaction with the text aids the act of discovery for students as readers and as writers on an individual level, the benefits are even greater in a collaborative environment. Collaborative writing assignments afford many opportunities for our students to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. By hearing and weighing what other students think, our students hone their analytical skills. And, surprisingly, the gains of collaboration can increase as groups enlarge. Since we were committed to the use of collaboration in writing classes, we decided to see what a class could do writing another kind of paper together: an analysis of literature. We assigned various works of literature, ranging from "any of Robert Frost's poems" to a dozen selected poems by one author. Then we gave our students a due date (ranging from three hours to four weeks) and let them go to work. We made a point of giving them very few instructions before they started. However they went at the task, though, they were to end up with one paper on which everyone had worked.

Our class of first-year students in Honors English had the biggest job and the longest time to complete it. They were to write on Robert Frost's poetry, and they were given four weeks to put the paper together. Our literature anthology included several Frost poems—a good starting point. The class quickly decided to go out individually and read other Frost poems and then come back to the class with a favorite or two from the ones they had read. They also decided not to read what critics said about Frost, at least not until later. (In fact, in the end they decided to let their own opinions stand, excluding published criticism from their paper.)

Their first week was spent in lively readings and discussion of Frost's poems, sometimes as a whole group (there were nineteen students) and sometimes in groups of about six. They chose nine poems to take home, read, and write about in their journals. The next week they read all nine aloud and, after much discussion, cut the number of poems to three, splitting up into three groups, each to work on its own poem. When this was done, each of the three groups read its analysis to the rest of the class, supposedly for feedback—additions and corrections. However, the others had little to say; they seemed happy to accept each groups' original work. They did, however, have a lively discussion about the similarities and differences in the poems and how their analyses might be linked together.

Next the class broke into two groups, one to write the introduction and one the conclusion, each group including members from each of the previous groups. A whole-class reading and critique of the complete draft followed. The students noticed how much repetition had occurred and looked for ways to eliminate it. This big editing session in class was frustrating and difficult, since each group had strong ties to what it had written. Most of the typing and proofreading needed to finish the project was done by volunteers outside of class time.

The class was delighted when the conclusion-writing group found a Frost poem, "The Armful," which spoke to the process they were going through. The poem tells of a person trying to carry a huge armload of packages, dropping them, shifting them, stacking them into a "better load." The students' assessment of their paper: "The 'armful,' of course, is the experiment, the mixing and jumbling of our ideas, thoughts and expressions on Frost. We have had to reorganize our ideas and then 'balance' them as new and better ones suddenly became apparent in the shifting. At the beginning of this mission we did indeed 'drop the armful in the road,' but in the process we picked up the pieces and finally stacked them."

Our other classes—a first-year class, a Methods of Teaching English class, and a recertification class for English teachers in grades 6–12—had less time for the project and a dozen specific poems to begin with. The other first-year group and the methods class used a similar combination of big group/small group/individual work to complete their projects. Interestingly, the recertification teachers were the most "stuck": they stayed in their big group of eleven for the whole time (a three-hour evening block), worked a possible thesis to death, and never got a paper together. We became so interested in the process that we watched them

agonize the whole time without giving advice. We wanted to see if they could rectify the situation, but they could not.

We discovered that the younger students felt freer with the assignment and perhaps did better for this reason. They were able to think about the ideas first, before worrying about writing them down. They often simplified the task, too. Of the three groups with a set of twelve poems, the first-year students immediately said, "Let's decide which one we like best and just write on *it*." Their focus helped them write a better paper, and, in the process of choosing the one to write about, they talked at length about the other poems before eliminating them.

Generally, the older and more schooled our students were, the more they worried about what the teacher really wanted, about coming up with a good controlling idea, about whether their interpretations had validity. There was less spontaneity, less discovery, and more of a sense that this whole process should be a solitary act. After seeing our results, we felt strongly that secondary students would have success with such a project because they are more likely to enjoy the sense of fun involved in a group effort. They may be more comfortable talking about literature with their peers than raising a hand in a class discussion. And they can stack their own views against those of the others, against a variety of opinions, rather than against "the word" of the teacher.

We began this project as a writing experience, but we quickly discovered that the value of the project lies more in the rich discussion of the literature that precedes the writing of the paper—all the reactions, interpretations, analyses, and decisions about what to use and not use. The paper is a necessary end. Without this collaborative goal, the interest in sharing ideas will not be as strong.

**The Down Side**

Change is always difficult. It is so much easier just to teach literature as we have taught it in the past, probably as we ourselves were taught. Experimenting with large-group collaboration brought certain inevitable frustrations. Committed to the benefits of large-group collaboration, we can now look at some of these frustrations as steps in the learning process. Each situation has been slightly different, but each has enabled us to anticipate possible problems in the future and reduce unnecessary stress for our students.

*Time* was always a problem, though handled differently with each attempt at large-group collaboration. Group work means allotting adequate class time to get the process moving and sufficient commitment by the students to meet outside of class. The first-year honors class ran out of time near the end of the semester and never felt that a true final draft was completed. The methods class complained that continuity was lost between sessions and that three 50-minute periods were inadequate to write a good paper. The recertification class was stymied into silence by the time constraint.

Two guidelines may help resolve these problems. The first is to make clear to students that they may work in any configurations they choose (alone, in small groups, in the big group) as long as they end up with one paper. The second is to tell the students to schedule their time and stick to the schedule as much as possible.

*Grading* is always a cause for concern. The students worried about one grade for everyone, but we insisted on just one grade for the paper. Because attendance was inconsistent and efforts varied, we agreed to consider participation by adding a participation grade. Each student wrote a statement evaluating his or her own participation and mentioning significant contributions of others. Often this is how we learned of the efforts of the quiet members of the class who did not talk much during discussion.

*The Final Product* loomed as a threat before many students. Most students worried that the product would not do justice to the poet's work. Older, more confident writers continually thought they could write better individually. The implied and oft-spoken message was "I'd rather do it myself." One methods student expressed it: "I had to give up a lot of control [that] I would normally have when writing alone." A more relaxed peer summed up the product anxiety problem: "Too many members were too uptight about this. The end product was not necessarily the most important part. I never thought we'd come up with an award-winning paper."

*Roles* that students assume in large groups do not simply happen. Egos and earlier experiences with group work can be obstacles. Some students wanted their roles to be assigned. Others thought we should have taken more active roles in dividing the responsibilities and directing various tasks. And certainly at times it would be much easier for the teacher to take control. When the frustration and disorganization seem overwhelming, it takes patience on the teacher's part to let the students untangle their messes and get back on track. Still, it is wonderful to see students rise to the task. Leaders emerge or are chosen, and quieter students find jobs they can do alone (typing, editing, proofreading).

*Numbers* of students per class cannot be ignored. In classes that have eleven, twelve, or even nineteen students, a whole-class project can be managed. Yet, many English classes have thirty or more students, compounding many of the problems already mentioned. With more than twenty students, we would suggest splitting the class into two large collaborative groups.

**The Up Side**

The We-search paper is enjoyable. Research shows that kids come to kindergarten loving to read and write, and school slowly sucks the enjoyment out of these activities. Writing and analyzing literature should not be tedious all the time, but for some students these tasks are tedious at best. The We-search paper is different—a nice change from discussion, lecture, small groups, and the more normal activities of class. The large-group assignment is neither the only nor necessarily the best way to treat writing and reading, but it is another resource. And it is a liberating experience, less confining than most school analyzing and writing.

*Insights* into the poems were gained by considering the opinions of everybody else, most students felt. One student wrote in her journal, "I'd give the learning process an A-plus. Group conversations were a big help. Made it so fun!" Another student said she has done an about-face: that she figured she was paying for someone to teach her about poetry, that she didn't want just the opinions of other dummies—but she's changed now and realizes that she knows more, perhaps, and more that is interesting to know, by having done it this way.

*Identities* as writers and critics were established. The students felt uncomfortable writing until they had established an audience. They grabbed onto each other's good phrases and kindly but resolutely removed those they did not like. They praised lavishly, criticized regularly but gently, and listened intently to their words and those of others.

*Independent interpretation* of poetry became comfortable. At first, they were so concerned with "doing it right." But they ended up believing in the value of their own interpretations, seeing themselves as members of a discourse community of analysts and critics.

Many students worked harder than they would have on a normal assignment. They put in extra hours and seemed to feel considerable responsibility for the outcome of the paper. "I can't

wait to see the paper all put together!" was written in one student's journal. Another student stopped to borrow a book one morning and said how excited she was after meeting outside of class with her introduction-writing group. She said it was "really fun to create the thing together and get something good." Several people commented about how much they learned that was not just about poetry and writing. Michelle said she learned a lot about herself, and Terri thought they even got a bigger picture of the poet.

Our Frost class wrote this near the end of their paper: "What we did do was to learn and evaluate, good and bad, the tricky process of how to work together and how to discover Frost in our own eyes. We were allowed to be original thinkers. We were allowed to experience and expand our knowledge of a poet personally without being told our views were wrong or outside of accepted literary convention. *That* is what is a big deal."

## TYING READER RESPONSE TO GROUP INTERACTION IN LITERATURE CLASSROOMS

by Edgar H. Thompson
Emory & Henry College, Virginia

That the meaning a reader creates during the act of reading grows out of an interaction between what is suggested by the written text, and each reader's prior knowledge and experience is an understanding Louise Rosenblatt long ago helped many of us see (*Literature as Exploration*, 4th ed. New York: MLA, 1983; *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1978). In fact, how we constitute a piece of literature changes over time and is constantly evolving, just as we ourselves change (Bruce Miller, *Teaching the Art of Literature*. Urbana: NCTE, 1980). In order to promote this evolution of meaning, students first need to respond to the written text through a procedure practiced in many high schools—writing reader responses.

The format that I use to guide my students' reader responses, one that has also evolved over the years, is distilled from ideas and suggestions made by David Bleich (*Readings and Feelings*. Urbana: NCTE, 1975) and Robert Probst ("Transactional Theory in the Teaching of Literature," *Journal of Reading*, 31. 4, 1987). The prompt that my students follow asks them to write a reader response according to three directions. They are asked to continue their reader responses after the reading has been discussed in class.

**Reader-Response Guide**

1. Respond emotionally/affectively to the assigned reading. How do you feel about what you've read? Bored? Excited? Depressed? Ready to go out and change the world? Confused? In a paragraph or so, verbalize your emotional response in specific terms.
2. Make associations between what you have read and your own experience. Push until you've gotten at least three associations. You may have had a similar experience or may have felt this way before.
3. Reflect on what you have read and reexamine the text. Find a word (or words), a passage (or passages), or a feature of the selection that caught your attention. If you like a phrase or sentence, write it down. Also, write down the page number where it occurs. Try to determine why you like this particular passage. How does it relate to other experiences you have had or other things you have read? If you are confused about something, isolate it, making a note of the page number or line. Phrase a question to ask a classmate, to ask in class, or to ask me.
4. Continue your thinking after class discussion.

For variety, I extend the above response by occasionally changing and adding questions like "What sort of person do you imagine the author of this text to be?" and "How did your reading of the text differ from that of your discussion partner (or the others in your group)?" as well as other questions suggested by Robert Probst ("Dialogue with a Text," *English Journal*, 77. 1, 1988).

Using this type of reader-response guide, or any similar variation, not only helps students create a record of their thinking but also helps stimulate class discussion. I have found that requiring students to specify which passages (complete with page references) they feel are significant greatly enhances the quality of the resulting discussion.

**Tying Reader Response to Group Interaction**

One further step that I take, one that really makes a difference, is to tie the individual reader responses very tightly to both the text and the class discussion. The reader responses, and their specific references to the text, become not only the beginning point for the discussion but also the focus, the reference point during the various levels of class discussion. Students start out with their individual response, which is expanded by small-group and large-group discussion, and then they are given a chance to reconsider what they originally wrote, to include ideas and concepts that have grown out of class sharing. The starting and ending point is always a reader's response to the text.

I have also found that the quality of the discussion is improved if it takes place at different levels. Quality learning in classrooms is achieved when students respond to reading assignments both individually and collaboratively in small and large groups, contend Richard and Jo Anne Vacca (*Content Area Reading*, 3rd ed. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1989). I have found this to be true. If students are first given the chance to claim what is of personal value to them during their reading, they are then more inclined to listen to what other students have to say. As they work in small groups, all students get a chance not only to respond and share with other group members—a chance they might not get for a variety of reasons in large-group discussions—but also to expand their perceptions, to be made aware of possibilities that had not occurred, and might not otherwise occur, to them individually.

I ask students to review the reader responses they have written the previous night, before starting the small-group discussions. Then I ask each small group (consisting of three to four students) to address the following questions, allowing students between 10 and 15 minutes to complete this part of the discussion:

"What passages or ideas in the text did you like?" (Be specific.)
"What passages or ideas troubled you?" (Be specific).
"What questions about the text or the ideas do you have?"

Next, as a large group, we discuss the same sequence of questions that they dealt with in their small groups. This portion of the discussion lasts anywhere from 15–30 minutes. At the end of the large-class discussion, I ask students to complete their reader response by responding to questions which are essentially a summary of their thinking:

> Continue your thinking after class discussion. After thinking about the questions listed below, quickly write a response to any or all of them:
>
> a. How do the points or issues raised in class relate to the meaning you read in the assigned selections? Have you changed your interpretation of the readings? If so, in what ways?
> b. Has something else occurred to you that relates to your reading or to the class discussion? If so, what is it?
> c. What else might you want to read or do to extend your understanding of this topic?

I then collect my students' reader responses, read them, and return them the next day.

The shifting back and forth from individual to small groups to large group adds immensely to the discussion. Importantly, the discussion begins with the meaning students initially constructed and ends with the meaning that has evolved for them during class discussion. Further, both individual and collaborative meaning constructed during small- and large-group discussions are internalized during the final written reflection.

This strong connection between specific references in the text and students' responses keeps the class and the learning focused. Students are free to respond, but they must always justify their responses in light of the text and the reactions of their peers.

**Reader-Response Alternatives**

The instructional paradigm I have just described serves me and other teachers well in our classrooms. Though my classes always start and end with each student's personal written response, I do vary the small- and large-group work, and I encourage you to do this as well. However, any procedure, no matter how powerful, can lose some of its effectiveness through routine use. Reader-Response Dialogues and Two-Page Debates are two examples of the numerous possible alternatives.

**Reader-Response Dialogues**

Ask your students to swap their individual reader responses with a partner. Then ask them to do the following:

1. Read each other's response.
2. Identify passages or ideas they liked in the response and write a note to the authors telling them why they liked these passages.
3. Identify passages or ideas that troubled them and explain why.
4. Return each others' responses and read the written notes.

In small groups and/or the large group (as time allows), ask your students to discuss some of the ideas or issues raised by the written dialogues.

Individually, ask your students to write a note back to their response partner commenting on their response and thanking them for it.

**Two-Page Debates**

As a large group, ask your students to choose 3-5 conflicting issues in the assigned reading.

Break the class into pairs or small groups and assign each group an issue. Within this grouping, ask one individual or one-half of each small group to take opposite sides of an issue.

Each half of the group should write a one-page statement summarizing their position, citing both personal experiences and information contained in the reading. You should insist that their references to the reading be specific, i.e., page numbers, so that the class can re-examine the text, if they wish.

Ask a representative for the "pro" and "con" of each side of the issue to read his or her written statements to the class. Ask the class as a whole to decide which side has written the most convincing argument. The class then moves on to the next group and the next issue. The ensuing discussion can be lively and time-consuming, so you may not be able to complete this activity in one class period.

In writing, ask your students to identify which issue they personally found most compelling. Be sure to ask them to write down ideas generated during the debate on both sides of their chosen issue. They will then be able to argue their position with full knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses.

**Conclusion**

If students are to develop independent judgment and deepen and sharpen their interpretations of literature, then it is imperative that teachers use reader responses and varied group interaction. When these two ideas are taken and tied together with the text as the reference point, and students and teachers act as guides and discussion peers, a classroom becomes more than just teacher-centered or student-centered. Rather, it becomes a forum where thought comes into being and is continually shaped through interaction with friends and partners in learning.

## MR. C. DIDN'T DO IT THIS WAY

by E. Carolyn Tucker
Dixon Junior High School, Kentucky

Mr. C. always allowed one class period for us to read our story in "lit" class. If we did not finish our assignment, we read it as homework. The next day we had a ten-question quiz about the story. At the end of the week, we had a vocabulary test of words from the selection; spelling counted. Finally at the end of the chapter, we would have a major test covering all the stories and their elements: plot, character, setting, conflict, symbolism, irony. I got an A in the class; I cannot remember a single thing I read.

When I became an English teacher, I was determined to make what I taught meaningful enough to my students that they would remember what they learned. And even though I used noted experts like Louise Rosenblatt as models, I found it easier said than done. I used quizzes and element analyses sparingly and studied plot, character, and setting only to a limited extent. We devoted much time to class interpretation, discussion, and writing in response to the literature. But, regardless of how diligent my efforts, the literature classroom changed more in response to other elements than to my desire.

At times, the factors of time, money, materials, and curricular regulation were at odds not only with my goals, but with each other as well. During a typical period of fifty minutes, I was expected to cover reading skills, composition, editing, vocabulary, spelling, research, grammar, and creative expression. I was expected to follow a sequence our system designed several years earlier, a document supposedly pulling various state and county guidelines together into one, all-encompassing sequence for education K–12, controlling daily lesson plans so that on any given day of the year (give or take a week) all teachers would be teaching the same thing to all county students. I hoped to provide my classes with abundant samplings from good, up-to-date, contemporary literature. But neither the school budget nor the department budget would cover the expense of anything more than the standard "lit" books—adopted every five years—and I had only one set of those books for four classes. I risked illegal photocopying but still fell short of what I wanted to give my students.

Additionally, I discovered that censorship—state, local administrative, and parent imposed—restricted the literature I was able to use in my classroom. A unit on mythology was challenged over religious concerns. The video of Tennessee Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire* was objected to because of its sexual overtones. Reading *A Day No Pigs Would Die* drew protest because of its references to animal mating. And *Kaffir Boy* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* met with resistence because of the racial unrest that might be generated—all this in light of the sexual, violent, and sacrile-

gious content that is prolific and accepted in contemporary soap operas, tabloids, commercials, movies, romance novels, news reports, and cartoons.

My literature class has been changed the most by my students, who have changed in response to a changing society. Today's students have become numbed by the influences of spectacular cinematography, astounding special effects, outlandish demands on believability, overt and glamourized sex, graphic violence, and steady doses of media bombardment. They have become desensitized to the quiet symbolism and irony so effective in good literature. They are oblivious to meaning beyond the obvious. In short, they have become video cyborgs who have been taught to synthesize but not to think beyond the most superificial levels and time limits. My censored, restricted literature classroom cannot compete with the glitz.

My approach to teaching, as a result, has been built around the one changing aspect that I can utilize: relevance. Students demand that their educational experiences be relevant to their lives, asking, "What has that got to do with me?"; "Why will I need to know that?"; and " Why do I have to waste my time learning something that will not help me in the real world?" So I now strive to structure my literature classroom around that which relates to their world as they see it, integrating the literature study with my teaching of composition, grammar, spelling, and vocabulary.

We read biographies and autobiographies when collecting material with which they will ultimately write their own autobiographies. We read of the adventures of Heracles and the adulterous affairs of Zeus as they study ancient Greek culture in their history class. Other myths can be connected to their studies in science.

Prejudice is a major factor in our rural Kentucky society, so I have an extended unit on that issue. We read about the Nazi prejudice against the Jews in *Diary of Anne Frank*; we read about racial prejudice in *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* and *Sounder*. And the literature often leads to a study of dialect, Black American English, and rap.

In an extended unit called The Future, I touch upon areas such as ecology with *Silent Spring*, space with Issac Asimov, farming with "Travail of Grouch," aging with *The Amazing Miss Laura* and *Passages*, and death with *Death Be Not Proud*.

Probably the most popular unit is entitled Teenagers; and during this unit we read *Member of the Wedding*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, *Old Yeller*, and *Francesca, Baby*. They also bring in pieces on teen issues from rock lyrics, scripts of docudramas, and poems and short stories from literary magazines like Voice.

I can say that the relevance of the topic about which my students are reading, almost without fail, generates desire in them to become involved in the literature we are studying. Admittedly, my students are not exposed to some of the classics, but until Shakespeare or *Beowulf* appear in rap form or as Nintendo games, I doubt they will dance their way back into my classroom. It may not be the way Mr. C. did it, but, as my students say, "Ain't no way those dudes have anything to say to me."

## A CONVENTION GUIDE: TRAVEL TIPS AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

by William C. Weber
Libertyville High School, Illinois

National and state conventions provide for enervated educators the perfect tonic from the classroom and the department office alike. If you think about it, directing an English department is, in its own way, as isolating as being a classroom teacher. Superiors rarely see us doing the real work, while at the same time our preoccupation with chairing the department tends to constrict our view of the profession as a whole. Relief is appreciated. A convention has purpose for all, whether instructing the incipient, inspiring the proficient, or rejuvenating the ancient. Having had the opportunity to attend a few of these gatherings, I offer here some practical advice for your next trip.

**Plan Ahead**

The earlier you can register for workshop sessions and conference hotels, the more likely you are to get what you want, so start now. Register by mail in advance. Money is always a factor, but generally it is worth the extra few bucks it takes to get a room in the headquarters hotel. This is where the action is. Just as important, the earlier you start, the more time you will have to plan and anticipate: "The readiness is all."

**Go Alone**

This applies for many reasons. We are no longer monastics, but we cannot deplete the school treasury either. A national convention can cost several hundred dollars, and school boards know two are not as cheap as one. More important though, you will see more, do more, and come back with your own experiences if you fly solo. Choosing the sessions you want to attend (and the ones you want to skip), selecting the shows, shops, and salons you want to see, getting up and getting in when you choose are all advantages of going alone. With a partner—colleague or spouse—you just do not have the chance to do as much. Besides, you will meet more people if you are alone: "You're on your own. And you know what you know. / And YOU are the guy who'll decide where you go."

**Meet People**

The boldface names on the convention badges are there for a reason. You will see people whose names you recognize from the textbooks you use and the professional journal articles you read. You will mingle among the most articulate and informed people in the world. Be friendly. If you are stuck for an opener, look at the the place name which is also on the badge and just say, "What's new in. . . ." The place name on the badge can help you spot people who are local to the convention city. Locals at the convention are invaluable in helping you attend the choicest sessions, savor the most sumptuous restaurants, and hunt down the best bargains. When you make your journal entry at day's end, be sure to write down the names of all of these English teachers you have met. New colleagues are a wonderful resource.

**Take Chances**

So many sessions and so little time remains the dilemma. Maybe you can listen to college types reading their dissertations in the morning, but by afternoon institutional ennui sets in, and it may be time to attend a session on humor in the school setting or methods to keep last period classes awake. Be sure to go to the ones that excite you—you might be expected to translate some of the enthusiasm to your department or school board. When in doubt, wander.

**Do It All**

Attend all the sessions. But if you decide on a broader sociological experience, then take advantage of being in a great world city. [Editor's note. I agree. NCTE will be in Pittsburgh in 1993.] Go to the tourist trap if you must, but check the price first. Browse in

the great shops. Check local papers (and locals) for the best theaters. Do not spend a lot of time in your room eating cheese snacks and watching "Knot's Landing"—you did not come to the convention for this. Late afternoon naps are legal, but only to recharge for the evening. You are on your own in The City and everything is within walking distance. Be urbane.

**Walk**

Bring a pair of sensible walking shoes in addition to your stylish dress shoes because the only way you can justify that extravagant meal at night is by walking it off on the streets by day. You are not in town to gain weight, so walk: to breakfast; to the convention center; to lunch; to see the sights; to dinner; to the theatre and the comedy club. One word of caution: at night, walk in groups with your new friends; if you find yourself alone (the only one sensible enough to call it a night), take a cab.

**Eat Strategically**

Nine bucks for Hotel Granola is beyond the ken and wallet of an English teacher. Bring your own breakfast or find somewhere you can get your bowl of cereal, juice, and coffee for less than three dollars. Nor should great sums be spent on lunch—the convention center usually has a modest if non-nutritional set up. Reflect and labor over dinner plans—this is where you want to spend your per diem. The local host committee often prints their suggestions (complete with pricings) of where to dine in their city.

**Shop**

Constant rectitude demands that we occasionally expend our talents on trivialities. Even on a limited budget you can bring home some local color from out/back/up/down there. Specialty shops abound for your significant others; my youngest son still cherishes the mini-lacrosse stick from Baltimore. Merely mingling among serious shoppers is half the fun.

**Be Dazzled**

There are always big names at the Big Convention. In the past, Patricia McKissack, Jerzy Kosinski, Charles Osgood, Cynthia Blair, Mel Gibson, and Ricki Seidman have been there to be seen and heard, live and in color, up close and personal. Gabriele Rico, noted author of *Writing on the Right Side of the Brain,* will be in Seattle, featured during a Sunday Brunch, sponsored by CEL. Expect to see famous people.

**Patronize Your Sponsors**

The publishers are dying to see you and these guys pay the bills. Big names emerge here also and free samples abound (bring an extra travel bag). Many publishers will treat you to wine and cheese get-togethers or breakfast if you show some interest. Bringing the boss's business card is probably gauche, but it often gets results from salespersons while saving time.

**Go Next Time**

You have had a fabulous time at the convention. And now that you know that you can go again, submit a proposal this time to be a presenter, chair, recorder, or reactor. It is time to start building your résumé, and besides, the "supe" is more likely to let you go if you are a part of the action. Good luck! See you in Seattle.

## LEADERSHIP FOR THE 90'S— THE CEL FALL CONVENTION

Celebrating the first year of a new decade, with a more inclusive name, the Conference on English Leadership (formerly known as CSSEDC) invites leaders at all levels to attend the 1991 Fall Convention, held immediately following the NCTE Annual Convention in Seattle. CEL welcomes elementary and secondary supervisors, instructional leaders, curriculum coordinators, department chairs, and other interested educators to gather for roundtable discussions, concurrent sessions, featured speakers, and social events.

At breakfasts and lunches, attendees will hear Ernest Lyght, a district superintendent from Westfield, New Jersey; Ruthe Sheffey, English department chair at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland; Joan Delfatore, associate professor of English from the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware; and Eliot Eisner, world–renowned educator from Stanford University, California. Be sure to register for the CEL Fall Convention, a Part II Workshop, at the NCTE Annual Convention! A new feature during the NCTE Annual Convention this year will be a Sunday Brunch, sponsored by CEL. Gabriele Rico, author of *Writing on the Right Side of the Brain,* is the featured speaker. Register for this meal function when you preregister for the conference.

# Book Review

### Smith, Michael W. *Understanding Unreliable Narrators: Reading between the Lines in the Literature Classroom.* Urbana: NCTE, 1991.

by Karen Watson
Mercer High School, Pennsylvania

Why do adults recall so little from their high school literature classes? This unsettling question—as well as some insightful solutions to the problem—is the subject of *Understanding Unreliable Narrators: Reading between the Lines in the Literature Classroom,* written by Michael W. Smith, a researcher and former secondary English teacher presently teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Like other offerings in the NCTE/TRIP series, it is a short and accessible book. In the first of its two major sections, Smith notes the differences between the way he taught composition—confident that his students were learning more than any particular assignment—and the way he taught literature. What Smith feared was that students were coming away from his literature classes with only the knowledge of "a few author's names, the definition of a few literary terms and a generalization or two about a few works." This realization lead him to study how students learn about literature and how to create a unit plan based upon his research.

In the first section devoted to theory and research, Smith cites many different and impressive studies. One I found particularly interesting involved the study of discussion in a poetry classroom. The researcher found that 81 percent of the dialogue was spoken by the teacher. In addition, 67 percent of the student responses were three words or less. When faced with the results of the research, the teacher explained that the students "do not have enough depth to find many meanings." Such reasoning makes for a Catch-22: students cannot learn to interpret literature because they do not get a chance to do it, and teachers will not allow students to because they are not well prepared to do so.

After reviewing pertinent research, Smith decided to make interpretive strategies the center of his instruction. This pedagogy is useful because students can transfer their newly acquired strategies to new reading experiences, helping them become more

confident in responding orally to literature, and leading to a more student-directed classroom. It also means that they get away from the rote learning.

In the second and largest section of the book, called Practice, Smith discusses the importance of identifying the "rules of the interpretive game," showing students what good readers do, just as successful teaching of process writing shows the way good writers write. Essentially, Smith presents a unit plan on the unreliable narrator. He walks the reader through each phase of the unit, naming works (even including two in his appendixes), giving copies of handout questions, and including examples of his students' reactions. For example, Smith discusses the importance of showing students that they come to the literature classroom with interpretive skills that are already somewhat developed. He shows his students that when they walk in, look at the teacher's posture, and say "Uh oh, he is in a bad mood today," they are interpreting behavior. He tells his students that they must simply learn to apply these life skills to literature. This makes the unit meaningful to them, and the success motivates the students.

Some teachers may be disappointed by the number of worksheets that Smith uses, but the majority of the questions he asks are thought provoking. These questions could also be modified and used in discussion or small–group work. Because Smith is offering a unit plan, instructors may have to work a bit to adapt these principles effectively to the literature or skills that they wish to teach; however, the guidelines and hints are there and worth the effort.

Smith does not attempt to solve the whole problem of literature carryover in one 65-page book. But in showing us current research and his sample unit plan, at the very least he gets us thinking about what is going on in our own literature classrooms and how we can make sure that our students are not only ready to play Jeopardy but are ready for the world.

# Software Review

### "EDIT!", by McGraw-Hill

by Wendy Paterson
Buffalo State College, New York

"EDIT!" claims to "add to the vigor, clarity, and effectiveness of your writing by helping you to rid it of grammatical errors, cliches, wordiness, and other problems. It also helps you focus your writing to suit a particular purpose or audience." Before we examine "EDIT!" and its claims more closely, a few words about the "style checker" software genre might be in order.

Teachers of composition have seen the positive changes in writing behavior that result from writing with word processors, and research studies document improvements in attitude toward writing, volume, and quality of student work and a variety of other phenomena of the computerized composition class. Wouldn't it be nice if there were software to help teachers with their worst nightmare—helping students to recognize their own errors in content, organization, mechanics, and grammar? This is the need that "style checker" software tries to fill.

But you see, although computer-assisted instruction performs brilliantly where quantifiable data is involved, it has yet to respond adequately to English syntax. This makes it difficult to use the computer to perform the complex judgments involved in the composing process. I have reviewed numerous style checkers and found that most are very slow, over-analyze the writing, and produce little transferable learning about writing. In other words, they don't do what they say they do. Unfortunately, "EDIT!" is no different.

"EDIT!" has a prewriting feature that asks the writer standard questions to start the creative juices flowing. There are many programs that do a much better job of assisting with invention (e.g., "SEEN" by Helen Schwartz, "Writer's Helper" by William Wresch, "The Writing Cycle"—new from Roxbury).

"EDIT!" allows the student to create and edit documents on its own internal word processor or to check documents generated by other word processors. Certain technical problems such as the spacing requirements for paragraphs (4=space indentation) and punctuation (2 spaces after periods) may slow the efficiency of the style checker.

The program's "check" function allows a writer to check the document on four levels:

1. Word level: checks for mechanics, confusing word pairs (i.e., to/too/two), vague, wordy or overworked expressions, cliches and euphemisms, racist/sexist language, slang, and stuffiness.
2. Sentence level: checks for expletives (i.e., there, it), indefinite pronouns, fragments, sentence length, and verb agreement.
3. Paragraph level: checks for transitional words and pronouns (to be sure the referent agrees), and asks the writer to identify topic and concluding statements for use in "Overall" idea development.
4. Overall: checks for sentence length variety and idea development, gives some "Post-write" questions, and displays statistics (i.e., number of words, sentences, paragraphs, average length of sentences, etc.).

To be fair, I ran "EDIT!" on a student document. It took me an uninterrupted morning to run the entire editing process on a document of 350 words. The length of each checking "run" is vexing, and the value of the information generated is minimal. The subjective judgments it makes are not related to context, and they may actually be more confusing than helpful. The style checker operates on a "search and match" procedure, where the program searches for words or phrases related to a preset library of common usage, much like a spell checker loads a dictionary and matches words. I did learn that my sample writer uses "very" too much, and that "EDIT!" thinks that almost all the words necesary to write a paper on "Learning Styles" are "stuffy" (including the words, "education" and "creative"). It was heartening to know that there were no occurrences of cliches or sexist/racist language. The author was reminded of the rules of agreement and reference to the point where it became nagging; the checker identified the problem words but did not judge the correctness of the usage. The sentence length feature counted the words, yet offered no assistance in evaluating a pattern or making a change.

All of the editorial functions I ran could be accomplished on any word processor with a "search/replace" feature. In certain programs, glossaries are available where students can look up problem words during the editing process (e.g., the handbook feature of "Norton's Textra Writer"). Any composition teacher can easily provide all the data necessary to have students check their own work for these items with a few "slight of hand" tricks of the word processor (watch for the next column). The overall check feature was unable to function with my student sample since we did not properly mark the topic and concluding statements. At one point the author felt almost insulted when told that the word

"interesting" is "practically meaningless!" *Really*, folks! (Overused word, cliche expression.)

I would like to offer some positive criticism for "EDIT!," but I think the time it would take to explain all the implications this program engenders could be better spent helping students develop their own system for checking and correcting common errors.

### CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS—PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500-5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always encouraged.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are welcomed. Inquiries about guest editorship of an issue are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

February 1992 (November 1 deadline):
**Real Evaluation: Testing, Assessing, and Measuring Student Performance**

May 1992 (February 1 deadline):
**Reading and Writing Connections**

October 1992 (July 1 deadline):
**Literacy: The Crisis Mentality**

December 1992 (September 15 deadline):
**Alternative Schools/Alternative Programs**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326. (FAX 412-738-2096).

## Announcements

### FEBRUARY RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON TEACHER THINKING AND KNOWLEDGE

The National Conference on Research in English and the NCTE Assembly for Research will host a conference, **"Teacher Thinking, Teacher Knowing—in Language and Literacy Education"**, at the Bismarck Hotel in Chicago, February 14–16, 1992. The conference will examine the thinking of teachers, how knowledge is used in the classroom, forces that shape teacher thought, and the development and support of teacher thinking in English education. Speakers will include Glenda Bissex, Deborah Britzman, Dixie Goswami, Beverly Moss, Anthony Petrosky, William Schubert and William Ayers, and Lee Shulman and Pamela Grossman. Papers will be mailed to registrants in advance of the conference to facilitate discussion. Conference registration materials and additional information can be obtained by contacting:

**Timothy Shanahan**
**University of Illinois at Chicago**
**Education (m/c 147)**
**Box 4348**
**Chicago, Illinois 60680**
**(312) 996-4677**

### FOREMOTHERS OF TODAY'S THINKING IN EDUCATION

A historical study from the National Council of Teachers of English shows how ten key women in the profession earlier in this century helped to develop the concepts that shape the teaching of English today.

From letters and personal papers of these influential teachers and interviews with those who knew them, the authors have created lively portraits of these women, each of whom served as NCTE president in the era 1929–1960. *Missing Chapters*, edited by Jeanne Marcum Gerlach, of West Virginia University, and Virginia R. Monseau, of Youngstown State University, is a biographical project of the NCTE Committee on Women in the Profession. Featured are Rewey Belle Inglis, Ruth Mary Weeks, Stella Stewart Center, Dora V. Smith, Angela M. Broening, Marion C. Sheridan, Lou LaBrant, Luella B. Cook, Helen K. Mackintosh, and Ruth G. Strickland.

These women, some from Eastern cities, some from the heartland; some from privileged families, some not, began as classroom teachers, a few in rural one-room schoolhouses. The contributing authors show them using their ideas and energy, their passion for excellence and concern for students and colleagues to break the social barriers that limited most women to narrow schoolteacher roles. After years of classroom experience, the future NCTE presidents became teacher educators, authors of textbooks, researchers, and heads of government-sponsored educational programs.

Contributors to *Missing Chapters* capture the flavor of past eras in education and offer pithy comments from their subjects and anecdotes from interviews with their colleagues. They show these women questioning accepted teaching practices of their times. Of language study, Inglis in 1927 demanded, "Can we justify drilling for accuracy on grounds of inherent right? Is not drill itself the accompaniment of a militaristic, autocratic structure?" She condemned the teaching of literature through memorization of facts, advocated writing to explore thoughts and to learn, and encouraged student teachers to use collaborative methods.

Seeking the best ways to promote learning in the language arts, these women anticipated reader response theory, noted the significance of film, studied students' reading preferences, advocated writing across the curriculum, proposed better ways for teachers to handle the paper load, opposed compartmentalization of knowledge, criticized basal readers, and researched the complexity of young children's language.

(*Missing Chapters: Ten Pioneering Women in NCTE and English Education*, edited by Jeanne Marcum Gerlach and Virginia R. Monseau. 232 pages, paperbound. Price: $16.95; NCTE members, $12.95. ISBN: 0–8141–3190–5. LC: 91–2082. Audience: teachers, professors, and administrators in English and education, students of history of education. Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Stock No. 31905–0015.)

# Conference on English Leadership Election Slate 1991

## CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERS-AT-LARGE (Vote for Two)

**DENNIS BECKMANN**, Department Leader and Teacher, Bryan Senior High School, 4700 Giles Road, Omaha, NE 68157. **Services to Profession:** NCTE: Reactor-recorder, 1986; Associate Chair, General Session, 1986, 1987, 1988; Chair, General Session, 1987, 1988; Presenter, General Session, 1988; CEL: Chair of individual session, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990; Presenter, 1988, 1989, 1990; Hospitality Committee, 1989; Candidate for Member-at-Large, 1989; Committee for *Quarterly* revision, 1989. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Presenter at OPS Fall Conference; Soccer and Track Clinician, local youth sports groups; contributor, advisor magazine; nominated, OPS Teacher of the Year, 1988; President Elect, Metro Track Assoc., 1988; 22 journalism staff awards, 1988; State Educational Association Outstanding In-House Newsletter Award, 1990; National Soccer Coaching License, 1990.

**Position Statement:** Departmental leadership and teaching are like two peas in a pod—both evidence strong direction through positive modeling; both demand the best, counsel to change the less than best; both set goals to exceed the grasp, but find ways for even the weakest to be successful; both realize that to lead is to follow.

**WILLA MAE KIPPES**, Teacher/Department Chairperson, Valley High School/Weld District RE-1, P.O. Box 156, 955 Birch Street, Gilcrest, CO 80623. **Services to Profession:** NCTE Presentations or Workshops: 1983, Denver, CO; 1984, Detroit, MI; 1988, St. Louis, MO; Associate Session Chairperson, NCTE, 1985, Philadelphia, PA.; CEL (CSSEDC) Nominations Committee Member, 1986–1988; Nominations Chairperson, 1988–1990; Program Chair, 1987–1990; Local Program Committee Member, 1990. CLAS (Colorado Language Arts Society) Nominations Chairperson, 1986–1987; Board of Auditors, 1988–1990. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** State Judge for NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing, 1987–1990; NCTE State Validator for the Centers of Excellence for Students At Risk Award Program, 1989–1990; Member of NCTE's Committee for Teaching English in Rural Schools, 1986–1991; Membership Chairperson for NCTE's Committee for Teaching English in Rural Schools, 1991; Scorer for Colorado State Writing Assessment, 1985.

**Position Statement:** I have heard leadership described as a strand that pulls and bonds and becomes a catalyst. CEL is that catalyst. It pulls together professionals with a variety of titles and roles. Our recent name change demonstrates this. We come together with a multitude of needs and concerns. CEL is the group that lends support in such areas as enticing vital individuals into our profession, reducing class size, disseminating resources, assisting others in the department, developing curriculum, and presenting a meaningful conference. The list continues to expand. The Members-at-Large on the CEL Board have the important mission of continuing to bring this catalyst together. Recognizing this, I accept the challenge to represent you on this Board.

**CELESTINE LYGHT-JAMES**, English Teacher and English Department Chair, Glasgow High School, 1901 South College Avenue, Newark, Delaware 19702. **Services to Profession:** Member: Commission on Literature, 1985–1988; Associate Program Chair, CSSEDC, 1990; Program Chair, CEL, 1991. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** F.A.M.E. (Forum to Advance Minorities in Engineering) Teacher of the Year, 1988, 1989; Glasgow Teacher of the Month, February, 1989; Research Grant ("Dr. Charles Albert Tindley: Hymnist—A Literary Interpretation"), 1985.

**Position Statement:** During the 1990s, it is vital for us as instructional leaders to focus on our role as supervisors with a great deal of reflection. In order to be effective as a team leader, we must examine, sketch, resketch and evaluate our objectives, goals, and curriculum as well as our teaching strategies. It is my strong commitment to education and to the profession of teaching English to help you meet the varied needs of the diverse students and personnel under your direction, and to address your issues of concern to the Executive Committee of CEL. Additionally, I accept the "call" to challenge you to become the "Best English Leaders" you can possibly be.

**PATRICK J. MONAHAN**, English and Communication Department Head, Downers Grove North and South High Schools, 4436 Main Street, Downers Grove, IL 60515. **Services to Profession:** Member of IATE, NCTE, CEL (Membership Committee, 1989–91), NEA. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Program Participant: "Using Learning Journals in the Content Areas" IATE, 1990; "All at the Beginning: A Study of the Effects of Instruction upon the Pre-writing Processes of Student Writers" NCTE, 1987; "Responding to the Paper Load: The Department Chair's Role in Crisis Management," CSSEDC, 1987.

**Position Statement:** I joined CSSEDC in 1986 because I was impressed by the eloquence of the candidates for Member-at-Large who spoke to me in San Antonio. Here were five teachers who cared so deeply about their organization that they had prepared inspiring speeches. They realized that CEL is an organization of very important people. As leaders in our schools, we have direct and powerful effects upon teachers and children.

No one who attends a CEL conference will fail to be impressed by the sense of purpose of its participants. They come to CEL to learn new ways to teach, to grapple with serious issues, and to speculate about the changing shape of our discipline and our schools. Through its warm supportive leaders and effective programs, CEL becomes an invaluable resource for its members.

As a Member-at-Large, I will seek to work with other leaders of English to serve the growing needs of our membership. I hope people will continue to leave our conferences and programs with briefcases brimming with ideas and enthusiasm.

## BALLOT INSTRUCTIONS

The CEL Bylaws permit members to vote either by mail or at the CEL business session of the annual fall conference. Each member mailing a ballot should mark it and mail it in an envelope with a *return name and address* to Doug Estell, 520 East Main Street, Carmel, IN 46032. Please mark "Ballot" on the outside of the envelope.

Ballots must be postmarked no later than November 1, 1991. Members who prefer voting at the conference will be given a ballot and an envelope at the business session of CEL. An institution with membership may designate one individual as the one person to vote on its behalf. Please list the institution name and address on the outside of the envelope.

## CEL ELECTION SLATE 1991

**Members-at-Large: Vote for TWO**

* alphabetical order

_____ Dennis Beckmann

_____ Willa Mae Kippes

_____ Celestine Lyght-James

_____ Patrick J. Monahan

_____ _____

(Write-in Candidate)

## CEL Executive Committee

**Chair**
Myles Eley
Warren Central High School
9500 East 16th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46229

**Associate Chair**
Paul C. Bellin
Weld County School District #6
811 15th Street
Greeley, CO 80631

**Past Chair**
Wendell Schwartz
Stevenson High School
1670 West Highway 22
Prairie View, IL 60069

**Liaison to NCTE Secondary Section Committee**
Mary Sue Gardetto
Ankeney Junior High School
4085 Shakertown Road
Beavercreek, OH 45430

**Corresponding Secretary**
Susan Hayles-Berbower
Huntington Beach UHSD
10251 Yorktown Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

**Membership Chair**
Mary Ellen Thornton
Patrick Henry Middle School
Houston, TX 77093

**Secretary-Treasurer/ Staff Liaison**
Miles Myers
NCTE

**Members-at-Large**
Susan Benjamin
Highland Park High School
433 Vine
Highland Park, IL 60035

Kristina M. Elias
West Hartford Public Schools
West Hartford, CT 06117

Thomas Fischer
Lyons Township High School
100 S. Brainard Avenue
LaGrange, IL 60525

Ira Hayes
Syosset High School
South Woods Road
Syosset, NY 11791

Daniel A. Heller
Brattleboro Union High School
Brattleboro, VT 05301

Deborah Smith McCullar
Dean Morgan Junior High School
1440 S. Elm
Casper, WY 82601

**ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY**
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
Champaign, Illinois
Permit No. 85



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

*Leadership for Excellence*

**Conference on English Leadership**

Volume 13, Number 4
December 1991
Editor: James Strickland


## In This Issue

### ENCORES: WHOLE LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND TEACHING

by James Strickland, editor

I had considered calling this our "Greatest Hits" issue because all of the articles deal with topics that have been previously featured in the *Quarterly*, but the title might make you believe these articles are reprints. These are all-new articles. Then, I thought of calling the issue "Bonus Tracks," the way some compact disks offer extra songs when issuing a popular artist's works, because some of the articles were ones that deserved to be printed earlier, but for which there was no room (even after doubling the size of the *Quarterly*). But I rejected the "Bonus Tracks" title, fearing it might give the mistaken impression that our holdovers are leftover outtakes. They are not.

The metaphor with which I finally felt comfortable is the "Encore"—a presentation given after the performance is complete, when an artist is asked by the audience to do one more song. The articles included in this issue are encores to well-received earlier issues. For the most part, these articles were written in response to earlier themes of the *Quarterly*, articles written by teachers who wish to continue the dialogue. If this issue has a theme, it is probably "Good Practices in English."

One of the good practitioners is Pamela Kissel, a teacher at Fayette-Manlius High School, active in the New York State English Council, working to finish her dissertation at Syracuse University. She offers suggestions for transforming literature classrooms in such a way that students are no longer driven to consult plot summaries of the great books. She calls her article, "Putting an End to *Cliffs Notes* Mentalities."

William Murdick and Rosalie Segin, of California University of Pennsylvania, follow up the discussion of whole language that took place in the February issue of the *Quarterly* by showing how the philosophy can be applied to a workshop setting. Murdick and Segin include an easily reproducible chart contrasting the whole language classroom and the traditional classroom. Feel free to photocopy, but remember to give credit to Murdick, Segin, and the *English Leadership Quarterly*.

The intrusion of television technology into the classroom has caused quite a controversy. Rick Chambers, a Canadian who teaches at the Grand River Collegiate Institute in Kitchener, Ontario, shows how the "Business of Television" can be used as an exciting unit of study in an English classroom.

We all recognize that the teaching profession depends on the quality of training our student teachers receive. Joellen Killion, from the Five Star School–Adams 12 in Northglenn, Colorado, writes of the innovative STEP ("Student Teacher Education Program") her school has taken (pun intended).

Theresa M. Hune, a young and enthusiastic teacher at the Seneca Valley Junior High School in rural western Pennsylvania, has found a way to blend technology and pedagogy in her creative writing class. She writes about "Using Computers to Foster Collaborative Learning."

(continued on page 2)

**Inside . . .** **page number**


**Putting an End to *Cliffs Notes* Mentalities** . . . . . 2
**by Pamela Kissel**

**Placing Whole Language in a Workshop Setting** . . . 4
**by William Murdick and Rosalie Segin**

**The Business of Television** . . . . . 6
**by Rick Chambers**

**Student Teacher Education Program** . . . . . 8
**by Joellen P. Killion**

**Using Computers to Foster Collaborative Learning in the Creative Writing Classroom** . . . . . 9
**by Theresa M. Hune**

**Sentence Combining: A Spoonful of Sugar** . . . . . 10
**by Jace Condravy**

**Taking Johnny Back** . . . . . 12
**by Carol Jago**

**Leadership as Shared Vision** . . . . . 13
**by Joseph I. Tsujimoto**

**Book Review: *Collaboration Between College English Departments and Secondary Schools*** . . . . . 14
**by James E. Davis**

**Calls for Manuscripts** . . . . . 15

**CEL Election Results** . . . . . 16



NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

Jace Condravy offers some tips about doing sentence-level activities that she developed working with underprepared college students at Slippery Rock University. "Dr. Jace," as her friends have taken to calling her, in honor of her recent, successful dissertation defense, titled her article after Mary Poppins, "Sentence Combining: A Spoonful of Sugar."

One of my favorite contributors, Carol Jago, of Santa Monica High School in California, frequently takes me at my word that "short articles are welcome." As always, her writing is as enjoyable and as sensible as it is brief. The recent recipient of an NCTE research grant, Carol shares her views about special education classes and advocates, "Taking Johnny Back."

Joseph Tsujimoto, poet, author of *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents* (NCTE, 1988), and classroom teacher at Punahou School in Honolulu, Hawaii, offers a poet's look at leadership. His article is entitled "Leadership as Shared Vision."

James Davis, of Ohio University, who recently took office as president of NCTE, offers a review of *Collaboration Between College English Departments and Secondary Schools*, a special issue of *FOCUS* (Winter 1988), the publication of Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English.

Bravo! Bravo!

## PUTTING AN END TO *CLIFFS NOTES* MENTALITIES

by Pamela Kissel
Fayette-Manlius High School, New York

Imagine a time, in the near future, when English teachers embark on their own kind of *Brave New World*, a world where yellow booklets often hidden in student desks or underneath books in student backpacks, better known as *Cliffs Notes*, once forbidden, have grown obsolete. The only cliffs students cling to anymore will be metaphors for their true interest in the texts they have learned to select, read, and interpret for themselves. A fantasy? A dream?

This brave new world of English classrooms may not be so distant. English educators are now becoming sensitive to the research on reader response, in the same way that they have become aware of the large body of research on the writing process and its implications for their teaching methodology.

### Demystifying Reader Response

Unfortunately, the rather dense and broad discussions of reader-response theories can be found hidden under the auspices of other, even more forbidding labels (i.e., deconstruction, semiotics, poststructuralism). Some reader-response critics and researchers, having gotten caught up in their own language, rhetoric, and political ends, seem to have left "real" classroom teachers in a philosophical fog. Regrettably, some English teachers may have been scared away from considering the importance of reader-response ideology because the jargon seems so formidable. Perfectly bright people can be confused not only by the content of these theories but, more importantly, by the implications these theories have for English classrooms.

In order to advance to a brave new world of literature instruction, English teachers need to feel confident that they understand the implications of a reader-response philosophy. In essence, reader-response theorists suggest that we move away from the New Critical approach to literature instruction, one that focuses on teaching a single, correct interpretation of a text. Instead, reader-response theorists support the notion that each reader makes his or her own meaning from a text based on individual experiences (past and present), expectations, and the purposes for reading the text in the first place, rather than a notion that assumes meaning is inherent and hidden in a text.

When I was first exposed to reader-response theories, I expressed in a journal several real concerns: "I'm troubled by the notion of responses to literature becoming a creation of communities because this idea seems dangerously re!ativistic. I'm also concerned about the extremes of literary response theory because certain theorists seem to ignore the intended perspective of writers." In retrospect, I find my first reactions interesting because I believe that my original fears about reader-response ideology were tied to my interest in preserving and protecting the prevailing mindsets of the English teachers who taught me about literature. I had also felt somewhat defensive about my own past teaching practices. "Oh my God," I thought, "I've been teaching literature wrong all these years."

However, within a relatively short time, I stopped thinking of my past teaching in terms of "right" or "wrong." It seemed unproductive to think about what I had been doing in dualistic ways. And since such thoughts would only serve to limit my growth, I began to draw on what I thought had worked well in the past—while shifting my methods to better serve my students—rather than focusing on what I had done wrong. I knew one of my primary goals was to help motivate my students to "want" to read, and through my own exploration of reader-response ideology, I've since grown to believe that my students *will* want to, once left with the true challenge and responsibility of finding meaning for themselves in the texts they read.

### Honest Receptivity

In spite of my original reservations about reader-response theories, I was excited from the beginning to think that my students could begin to feel truly empowered in the process of making meaning from literature. Consequently, I felt motivated to think of ways my English classroom could change in order to better foster student interpretations of the texts. I also considered the possible dangers that might face me as the teacher in this brave new world I wanted to create. What baggage from past practices would I be bringing with me into our literature discussions?

Just because I had begun to read research on reader-response theories did not mean that I had stopped forming my own opinions about books. I had not suddenly grown invisible as a reader and thinker in my classroom. I also knew that, as the teacher, my opinion would often be given significant weight by my students. For one reason, they realize that often I have read the books assigned to them many times before. For another,

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy where such endorsement is clearly specified. Copyright for articles published in *English Leadership Quarterly* reverts to the respective authors.

*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

they know that as their teacher, I give them tests and assign them grades. These factors have all played a part in why students have learned not to trust their own interpretations of books.

If teachers want to foster their students' own interpretations of what they read, it must begin with a sense of trust and receptivity. Robert Probst (*Teaching Literature in Junior and Senior High School*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1988) cautions teachers not to pretend to be receptive:

"If the discussions are to invite the responses and perceptions of the students, it is necessary that these responses and perceptions be welcomed. The teacher must let the students know that their comments are solicited and will be given consideration. Pseudo-inductive plans, in which the teacher, under the pretense of open discussion, leads the class to a preordained conclusion, will show students that their opinions are not seriously considered and that they are asked to speak only to contribute bits and pieces of an argument already formulated by the teacher" (p. 24).

In addition to being honestly open and receptive to students' interpretations of texts, teachers will also need to feel open to a variety of directions class discussions will take. Teachers act as facilitators, the ones who work to clarify the comments of students, work to draw out the more reluctant members of the class, and encourage critical and analytical thinking about texts based upon what students share about their readings, rather than directing class discussion to a predetermined end.

**How English Classrooms Might Look**

Now that I have begun to rethink traditional literature instruction, one of the questions I have raised with my colleagues is how to restructure our classrooms to more effectively get at our students' own responses to texts. I now realize that I began a gradual process of "deconstructing" some of my old teaching methods without being fully conscious of the underlying reasons for the changes I was making. In fact, not until I decided to write an article about the influence of reader response on the teaching of literature in the secondary classroom did I fully clarify for myself what I thought I was doing differently in my own classroom.

By the end of this past school year I realized that I rarely went to my file cabinet anymore. I had grown disinterested in the material I developed on books I had taught in the past. In retrospect, I realize that I stopped giving unit tests on books altogether. My lesson plans no longer included a series of questions developed around what I thought was essential to the reading assigned the night before. Instead, my plans became more and more focused on the process of how students would share their own questions or ideas about the reading they had done for homework.

The questions I asked my students often started out in a very broad way; I hoped to invite conjecture and get at a variety of multiple interpretations of texts. For example, in the past, when I taught Sophocles's play *Antigone*, I had always considered Antigone to be a wonderful female role model, a strong-willed woman of great moral integrity. Yet, last year, when I began class discussion of the play, I started out by asking, "So what do you think of the character Antigone?" A female student responded by saying that she thought Antigone was stubborn and self-serving, just like her Uncle Creon. This response surprised me, not because it wasn't a valid one, but because it was one that I had not held personally. I had thought Creon to be the perfect example of inflexibility and hubris in a character. Rather than feeling compelled to impose my rather traditional and perhaps trite interpretation on the students, I just let the discussion proceed from that student's observation.

As we continued to read and discuss the play, the students themselves began to decide whether Antigone's motives were based on high moral principles or acts of self-engrandizement. I found the class discussion interesting and looked forward to future classes to see how the students would continue to interpret the unfolding events of the play.

This example may sound like a simple and small change in my teaching practice, and I think it was, but I also think that small changes like this have led to more student investment in reading and thinking, in particular, and a more stimulating and fun-filled classroom, in general.

Another method I have used to encourage students to make their own responses to texts is to ask them to keep a reader-response log. While reading each night's assignment, students are asked to include approximately three questions and three statements or ideas about their reading. I used this log as a source for class discussion. Students were put in pairs or in small groups and asked to share questions or ideas from their logs. From these discussions students made small, informal presentations, and in some cases, went on to develop more formal speeches or group debates.

In place of formal unit tests on books, students engaged in singular or group projects. For example, when my students read *Rite of Passage*, Alexi Panshin's futuristic work, they were asked to interview someone in their family about changes in the institutions of family, education, or religion. They were given several weeks to conduct their interviews, and then they were to submit a three- to five-page paper on what they had learned. They also gave formal oral presentations on their findings to the class.

When my students read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's classic, they were asked to look for a current example of prejudice in our society. My students shared incidents of prejudice that were reported in the news or recalled by friends or relatives, or explained personal encounters with prejudice. I also asked my students to write something that I call a "think-piece," based on a current example of prejudice they had investigated. In the think-piece, the students are asked to write freely—in an exploratory way—about ideas that come to them.

Interestingly, at first students seemed to have a hard time writing their think-pieces. They had been so used to more specific writing requirements that they seemed cautious and uncertain. Subsequently, I spent time with my students talking about the differences between analytical and reflective thinking. I told them that when they were trying to formally analyze something, they should stick to facts and be quite certain about the point they were trying to prove. However, in reflective writing, they were free to explore ideas just to see where they might lead and did not have to be certain about the point they were trying to prove.

As they began to take more responsibility for thinking about the literature they were reading, my students also became empowered to write about their own ideas in new ways. Think-piece writing activities led quite easily into creative and fiction writing opportunities. Students who can think for themselves can also write for themselves.

As my students grew more confident of their creative abilities, I think my teaching also became enhanced. After my students read *Totto Chan*, Tetsuko Kuroyangi's nonfiction work about a Japanese girl's special experiences in a private school, I asked them to choose a partner who shared a similar philosophy of education and create their own school. The students had to decide on the school's mission statement, and they had to determine the type of skills a student would develop by the time of graduation. They also had to make a schedule for the school day, a visual depiction of the

school, and decide on the types of courses offered, based on the type of students they hoped to be shaping. Finally, the students presented their model schools to the whole class. The results were truly moving. I think what excited me the most about this project was the extent to which the students became totally engaged in the schools they had created. It was clear that the students had learned much more from this activity than if they had taken a unit test on the book.

When students learn to work in pairs and in small groups, they begin to see each other as potent sources of information. I think they begin to appreciate themselves and each other as meaning makers. They look to the teacher as the person who can help them to ask helpful questions. And as students become confident as readers, writers, and thinkers, they also grow more anxious to "show off" the ideas they have developed to the teacher and each other. In such settings, teaching and learning are truly fun and exciting.

**Listening Is Sometimes More Important Than Talking**

In his reader-response log this year, a student wrote: "Listening is sometimes more important than talking." Though this response had often been noted before, when I read it written in my student's own handwriting, I realized how this simple observation applied to all learners—teachers and students. Other comments or observations my students made in their reading logs helped confirm my newly held beliefs about the importance of helping students work to find their own meanings in what they read.

One girl wrote, "Totto-Chan is very curious, and she asks a lot of questions, and I think this is why she's so bright and clever and smart. Maybe that's why she got kicked out of her own school—she asked questions." In an English classroom where students are encouraged to think for themselves, asking questions is a natural and exciting consequence of reading.

Another boy wrote about the school Totto-Chan attended, "I feel the goal of the school was not as much to create factually intelligent people, but to make them better people by teaching them to think independently and act positively toward other people." For me, this statement reflects the purpose of all good instruction and is especially important as a focus for English classrooms of the twenty-first century.

**Braving New Worlds**

Not all students find being asked to think about what they read in critical ways an entirely positive experience. One girl wrote, "I have officially decided to stop thinking—it takes too much energy." Being in a classroom where they are expected to take responsibility for interpreting their own texts does require more energy from the students. For this reason, they may sometimes wish for easier approaches and yearn for a quick reference to a noted source for help on the next anticipated literature exam.

However, I would like to argue that English teachers can put an end to this kind of *Cliffs Notes* mentality, by continuing to encourage students to shape their own understanding of what they read. Students will become their own best sources of ideas when discussing literature. And perhaps when this is true, then the following quote, which I found in a student's reader-response log, will look more like a facile complaint than a sad account of a young student's reality: "Adults can get so mad because they don't understand that things can be fun. Adults are very egotistical—they think their way is the best way all the time."

There is still much to think about in forging ahead in our English classrooms. Fancy rhetoric and dense philosophical discussions, once sifted out, can prove helpful to practitioners. A challenge ahead that I wish to tackle has to do with getting away from teaching single texts to whole classes, and providing more options for students to choose the texts they want to read. Such adventures have begun in some of my colleagues' classrooms. I continue to ask other English teachers how they allow for multiple-text reading in their classes. Once I feel confident that I am prepared to deal with the logistics of teaching multiple texts, I think my students will only be further challenged to take responsibility for their own reading. And as far as I'm concerned, that's what my job is all about.

## PLACING WHOLE LANGUAGE IN A WORKSHOP SETTING

by William Murdick and Rosalie Segin
California University of Pennsylvania

While the February 1991 issue of the *English Leadership Quarterly* dealt thoroughly with the concept of "whole language," in this article we wish to provide a description of the "workshop classroom," which we believe is the proper setting for whole language instruction.

What teachers and administrators often do not get from discussions of issues like whole language and workshop approaches to education is a clear picture of what the classroom will look like when these theories are implemented. What goes on in a classroom informed by a whole language philosophy? In particular, how is it different from language education in a traditional classroom? What kind of leaps are teachers and administrators being asked to make?

In response to such questions, we have drawn up a double-column chart contrasting a traditional classroom with a whole language workshop classroom. For faculty and administrators looking into whole language and workshop approaches, we hope our chart provides a quick overview and a sense of how the new and traditional classrooms compare.

**Whole Language Assumptions**

For those who missed the February issue and need an introduction to the philosophy, whole language assumes that students will better learn how to read, write, speak, and listen if they (1) engage in those activities rather than in "subskill" exercises, (2) undertake those activities as real or functional activities rather than as meaningless "schoolwork," and (3) experience those activities in integrated formats.

To elaborate upon the first point, students read whole texts and write whole texts; they do not read passages or texts that have been "dumbed down" for them, and they do not write isolated "sentences" or "paragraphs" (except on those occasions when a sentence or a paragraph might work as a whole text). Students write essays, stories, plays, reports, reviews, journal entries—real, complete works. That is what it means to engage in the activity itself.

To elaborate upon the second point, insofar as possible—and here implementation is difficult—students read and write and talk and listen for personal, compelling reasons. For instance, they write because they have something to say to an audience (their fellow students, the teacher, someone outside the classroom). They read because they want to discover something, and they read for personal pleasure. That is what is meant by making the language activities real or functional.

Concerning integration, in a typical configuration students might talk to each other in small groups about what they want to write about; as they listen to each other, they often come up with new ideas for themselves. Next, students would write

| | Sub-Skills Pedagogy | Whole Language Workshop |
|---|---|---|
| **Vocabulary** | --Word lists<br>--Formal definitions<br>--All students learn the same set of words<br>--Tests and exercises | --Vocabulary acquisition, often unconscious, comes out of reading and talking about subjects that students write about; words are learned as they need to be for purposes of understanding reading or for purposes of expression.<br>--Not all students learn the same words.<br>--Range of meaning of a word is learned by seeing it in contexts; the teacher may provide extra contexts for a word when one encounter is not enough for a student trying to understand a meaning |
| **Spelling** | --Word lists of "spelling demons"<br>--All students learn to spell the same set of words<br>--Rules are memorized<br>--Tests | --Spelling is treated as an editing responsibility; students try to identify and correct misspelled words in their own papers<br>--Each student works on those words he or she uses and has trouble with (personal demons)<br>--Rules may be offered as an explanation when a pattern of error occurs |
| **Correctness** | -Rules for grammar, mechanics, and punctuation are taught to the whole class in lectures<br>--Exercises using contextless sentences written by others<br>--Tests | --Correctness is treated as an editing responsibility; students try to identify and correct errors in their own papers<br>--Reading their papers aloud helps students hear and recognize their own errors and awkward phrasing<br>--Students learn from listening to questions about correctness raised by peers or the teacher; the teacher may act as a professional editor and fix mistakes in a work that is going to be shared or published |
| **Paper Topic Selection** | --Students are assigned topics invented by the teacher for this course | --Ideas for papers come out of reading or class discussions of subjects, or out of the personal interests of the writer |
| **Planning / Invention** | --Either students are asked to begin writing immediately after having been given the topic, or they are asked to produce a restrictive outline, such as a thesis and a set of topic sentences | --Students are encouraged to talk about their subjects, to read about them, and through activities like freewriting, to think about them before investing a lot of time in a first draft |
| **Drafting** | --This lone operation, usually done in one sitting, may be seen as equal to writing | --Seen as that aspect of the writing process in which the writer temporarily works alone, bringing together fragments of experience from reading, talking, research, and thinking. At any time, the writer may return to his/her human and literary sources. |
| **Revision** | --The writer reworks the text alone in silence | --Finished drafts are discussed in peer groups or in one-to-one conferences. Confusions are discovered; new ideas arise out of the discussion.<br>--The writer may read the text aloud, listening to the flow of the words and syntax and to the sense of the statements; some the paper's rhetorical weakness may be revealed in the sounding out of the text |
| **Editing** | --The student is responsible for his/her own editing<br>--Texts which contain errors may become examples in the teacher's lecture or handout<br>--Students practice editing sentences in workbooks | --Like professionals, the writer seeks help with editing from peers or the teacher (who often functions as a professional editor)<br>--The writer's motivation to edit is a desire to make the text look good to its audience (usually the rest of the class or selected classmates)<br>--The teacher, like a professional editor, makes sure that there are no embarrassing errors in a published text |
| **Evaluation** | --The finished product is judged by the teacher's private, idiosyncratic standard ("After ten years of teaching, I know what a B-paper looks like.")<br>--A "B-paper" exists in an absolute sense, unvarying and independent of writer, audience, or communicative purpose. | --Success or failure is ultimately the judgement of the writer, who compares her product with what she was trying to achieve in her language environment<br>--Evaluation by peers or teacher is done, so far as possible, in terms of the degree to which the writer achieved her purpose<br>--The teacher uses "kid watching" techniques to observe changes in a student's writing habits; evaluation may take into account progress in developing a sophisticated writing process<br>--The teacher approaches the text as an interested reader of a real piece of writing<br>--Since risk taking is encouraged, failure is permitted; not all papers are evaluated by the teacher or peers |

everything they know or feel about the subject, to discover what they do not know as yet and need to find out, or to discover what they feel. Following this initial writing, they would read about their subject, after which they would write in response to the reading. Finally, they will share their work with another student, or the group, or the whole class, either orally or through distribution of their texts.

Learning occurs naturally and unconsciously, with little direct assistance from the teacher, who carries out the important role of classroom manager instead.

**The Workshop Classroom**

A workshop classroom is ideal for bringing whole language education to fruition. In a true workshop, students work independently, either as individuals or in small groups. A key feature is that not everyone has to do the same thing at the same time, nor does everyone have to read or write the same amount. Occasionally, the teacher addresses the whole class, and occasionally the whole class participates in discussions. But ideally—and this is an achievable ideal—a workshop classroom can function even without teacher guidance, once students understand how it works and what they should and can do during the "workshop hour," namely write, or read, or work in a group on a project, or work in a group to give feedback to a fellow student on a piece of writing. On the college level, it is not unusual for a teacher to leave the room for an extended period of time while the students carry on workshop activities by themselves.

If the workshop is to work, it demands that students are trusted and respected as learners. Yet, it is the general rule, to our shame, that students are treated at every level as antagonists to the learning process, unwilling and unable to learn on their own. For example, on those occasions when one of the authors of this article knew in advance that he would be unable to meet a class, it was his practice to ask his first-year composition students to meet on their own and conduct a workshop at the normal class hour. However, an administrator, upon finding out about that practice, asked the state university teacher to get a colleague to "cover the class" when he had to be absent in the future. No wonder so many of our students slump impassively in their seats like empty vessels, waiting for us to pour into them not the knowledge and wisdom of the ages but the answers to the next test. Teachers operating from a whole language workshop stance need support from administrators, and both must have respect for students.

The fact that students learn independence in a whole language workshop does not mean that teachers can put their feet up on the desk and snooze away the hour or that they do not need to acquire teaching skills. Quite the opposite—it takes more teaching skill, and usually more energy, to run a workshop classroom than it does to sound off at the blackboard. Teachers who merely parade their knowledge of traditional grammar, for instance, exert themselves far less than teachers who grapple daily with the chaos of student writing. Although we mentioned the possibility of a teacher leaving the room, it is more often the case that a teacher spends the class time conducting one-on-one conferences, a teaching method requiring complex skill in delicately balancing the need for student independence (student ownership of the text) with the need for offering productive advice leading to writing growth through revision.

It takes a knowledgeable teacher practiced in modern pedagogy to maintain an effective language learning environment (we recommend Bill Newby's professional development program devised for teachers at Shaker Heights High School, which is described in the February issue). Both the whole language teacher and the traditional teacher are active in the classroom. But providing and managing opportunities to learn is far different from trying to teach language at a blackboard and trying to break language down into subskills for students to practice. In a whole language classroom, students do not practice, they *do*.

The fundamental rationale for whole language teaching is that it takes advantage of the natural and remarkable language-learning capabilities of human beings. The traditional method, unfortunately, works against that powerful inclination and talent our students possess. It does so by denying them involvement in meaningful language use. The net result is that students will, indeed, develop linguistically, but will do so through language experiences outside their English classes, and will do so despite their English classes. The only thing students acquire from discrete skill exercises is a contempt for English as a subject and a feeling that language study is useless. Studies have shown this, such as the one conducted by W. B. Elley and his colleagues in New Zealand ("The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School English Curriculum," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 10.1 [1976]).

It is tempting to conclude that students are better off not taking English courses at all, if such courses fail to advance their abilities while turning them off to reading and writing. Yet, students cannot learn entirely on their own; they need the resources and stimulation of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They need encouragement, order, direction, goals, time frames, and even correction and criticism. "Children have a natural talent for learning about language through active participation in the language game, a talent that far exceeds the talent of adults to instruct them about it," comments psycholinguist George Miller ("On Knowing the Right Word," *National Elementary Principal*, 57.4 [1978]). A whole language workshop provides students with the opportunity to play the language game at a level of intensity not found elsewhere.

## THE BUSINESS OF TELEVISION

by Rick Chambers
Grand River Collegiate Institute
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Marshall McLuhan, years ago, had some interesting ideas about Gutenberg's revolution: how books taught us to think in a linear way—left to right, top to bottom, logical, organized. Television has changed that. We spend hours in front of the television set, watching while holding on to the remote control channel-changer. The remote control empowers the holder to change channels at whim, bouncing between programs, watching a football game, a sitcom, a movie, MTV, local news, and commercials all at the same time. Television viewers graze, wandering sometimes aimlessly from channel to channel until something visually arresting grabs their attention. Where is the Gutenberg logic and organization in that? Where is the linear thinking?

McLuhan said that we were soon going to be dealing with a post-Gutenberg crowd, people who would not instinctively relate to books and the written word (*City as Classroom*. Toronto: The Book Society, 1977). As we look around our classrooms, we can see that, on many days, that crowd has arrived: visual learners, the television-age, nonreaders. Stories that students tell us, their terms of reference, their heroes, their interpretation of news events are largely media generated, often seen on television in bits and bites. Rather than throwing up our hands in despair that so many young people are not reading newspapers and novels, or damning the pernicious presence of television, we in the En-

glish classroom could make use of the material that students already know about television, and then use television to help students with writing, reading, thinking, speaking, and critical viewing skills.

The first thing that students should realize is that television is a commercial enterprise, run by people in business to make money. Rarely does anyone go into television for altruistic reasons. Students should be aware of who runs and gains financially from television because the views of those people will dominate the medium. The influence that corporate giants have on the values that are transmitted by television programs is significant: corporations and backers do not want their customers and viewers to turn off their programs or commercials because of offensive or controversial material. Corporations are going to support a worldview, a philosophy which, at the same time, is going to appeal to the broadest audience possible and which will not be offensive to its customers and investors.

One assignment that can help make students aware of the connections between television and corporate money is to have them check the weekly Nielsen ratings in *Variety* magazine (154 West 46th Street, New York, NY 10036) or find ratings in the entertainment section of their local newspapers. Networks cannot maintain shows without good ratings because, if they are not attracting viewers, advertisers will not purchase time to advertise their products. Networks will not support an unpopular show because of the lost advertising revenue. If a program on the commercial networks has a Nielsen rating of less than 10, that program is in serious trouble. Have students write a report on the feasibility of maintaining such a program, or how it could be rescheduled or changed to increase its audience. Challenge students to find out and report on changes in television schedules. Ask them to discover why certain programs were rescheduled or dropped. Students could also investigate local television costs: How much do local stations budget for syndicated programs, for news production, for salaries? Students could examine the values of a particular situation comedy: How do its values reflect the values of the corporate owner? Are there any values other than truth, goodness, honor, love, family virtue, and the importance of consumerism?

Students need to be aware of the speed at which television works—not only the rate at which shows can appear and disappear from the schedule but the actual writing formulas for the shows. Jolts Per Minute (JPMs) are requisite ingredients in most programs: laughs, violent acts, swearing, insults, and loud noises. Have students watch only one minute of a sitcom and count the JPMs. Students might compare the JPMs in "Cosby" or "Cheers" with those in something like a PBS series or "Murder, She Wrote." It will be an amazing revelation: depending on the show, the JPMs will increase or decrease. The different JPM counts say much about the audience for each show: more JPMs for a youthful audience, fewer for an older audience. Counting JPMs and camera shots in commercials or rock videos (longer commercials) reveals much about the speed of television and how audiences can be influenced or visually stimulated with constant JPMs. JPMs also tell us about the attention span of audiences—whether or not we need to be jolted every few seconds to maintain our interest—and how television influences it.

One reason for the absence of logical reasoning or linear thinking on television is its great emphasis on style. As Neil Postman says, in *Amusing Ourselves To Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), "there now exists a substantial audience that does not require its television to tell stories or even to make a great deal of sense, so long as it stimulates the eye and the ear." This can be seen with blown-dry news anchors, MTV, and programs such as "Miami Vice." Students could look closely at the stylishness of the news, both the network news and the local broadcasts. They could be asked to consider the importance of the set, the color, the graphics, the clothes worn by the newsreaders. They could decide why so few stories are told without pictures and why local stations seem to focus on fires and traffic accidents. They could look at how graphics clarify or help to explain what the announcer is saying. More than any other program, "Miami Vice" consciously set out to reflect a certain style. For example, its producer, Michael Mann, said, "In the show's world, all low-rent people live in Art Deco, and all high-rent people live in postmodernist, and nothing in between." Have students view a few minutes of an episode of "Miami Vice": Look for the predominant colors, the influence and volume of the music, the camera angles, the stylishness of the clothes, the JPMs, and lastly, some evidence of a story.

Students need to know that television is not necessarily "art reflecting life." In a promotional brochure from NBC in 1984, the corporation (then owned by RCA, now by General Electric) said that members of their Broadcast Standards Department make an effort "to make sure that what we [NBC] broadcast is acceptable to viewers and in the mainstream of American tastes and values." Do programs reflect tastes or create them? The National Institute of Mental Health reported a couple of years ago that a majority of adults and children in America use television to learn how to handle their own domestic roles. Gary David Goldberg, producer of "Family Ties," said on a PBS special that if his show works, families will watch "Family Ties" to learn how to be better families.

Naturally, television programs would like to say that they reflect us, and we, by the same token, would like to be favorably compared to the characters whom we watch on television. Many fathers would like to have the wisdom of Steven Keaton or Cliff Huxtable; many young men would like to be as attractive or clever as Alex Keaton or Mike Seaver; many six-year-olds would like to have the one-liners Andy is given on "Family Ties." All families would like their domestic crises solved slickly in twenty-two minutes, and to live in attractive suburban homes, with the latest appliances, new clothes weekly, and few cares about money or income.

Students need to examine sitcoms. How do the shows reflect us, our values, our families? What do the sitcoms say to children? What painful truths about themselves do the stories examine? How often are visible minorities seen on these shows, and if they are, what is the context? When are world problems, or even local problems, discussed in sensitive, realistic ways? When are opinions from extreme ends of the spectrum encouraged, or even tolerated? Are the ideas accepted or ridiculed?

Now a word of caution: these kinds of questions are not designed to make students feel uncomfortable about their favorite programs. The point of this study is lost if students suspect that the teacher is looking at television simply to destroy any enjoyment they might receive from it. At all times, make the study as clinical and objective as possible, avoiding your own value judgments about the programs. Let the shows speak for themselves.

Television can be a valuable learning tool in the classroom: it is forever relevant, contemporary, and topical. It can be used to help enhance students' critical viewing abilities, as well as their writing, thinking, and speaking skills. Further, television is here to stay: rather than shrinking from its presence, teachers should use television to help make students more knowledgeable consumers of the medium.

Media-oriented magazines, such as *Channels* (Box 2001, Mahopac, NY 10541), carry useful statistics that teachers can use in the classroom to generate discussion and creative writing projects. One such article presented an interpretation of the meaning of Nielsen ratings for producers, station managers, and the general public. Using such an article, students can find information about who watches the most television, when it is watched monthly, weekly, hourly, and who the most desirable audience is for advertisers. Armed with such statistics, students can move ahead with the creation of their own television schedules. Students can take their Nielsen information, what they know about style and the importance of profit, and the desirability of an upscale audience with strong family values, and then design their own evening of prime-time programming. Their schedule could include oral as well as written defense of their choices.

Then, working in groups, students can design their own geared-for-success television program: sitcom, action-adventure, or nighttime soap. In the planning stages, the groups could target the "right" audience demographics, the mainstream values that will need to be a part of the show, and the general format of the program. Next, the group could further develop the program concept: setting, characters, typical conflicts. A sample pilot episode could be designed, including things such as title, logo, and theme music. Finally, to finish this television assignment realistically, the group could decide how to sell its program to network executives (other students in the class): the groups will want the best place in the schedule for attracting the right audience to develop a long-term commitment to the show, and ultimately, huge profits.

Students could also be given the freedom to follow their own interests in developing television project assignments: the realities of local police life versus television police shows, the attraction and financial importance of reruns, the Japanese cartoon industry, children's advertising and programming, the sociological impact of some children's shows, the manipulation of emotions and creation of news stories, or the roles of stereotypes on television. Panel discussions, debates, reports, role-playing situations, using audio- or videotapes, charts and models are all ways that students working individually or in groups could show what they have learned from their surveys, interviews, investigations, reading, and research about television.

English courses can show students how television programming works, how television can manipulate, how it skillfully entertains, how it shapes opinions and creates reactions. While allowing them to practice all the reading and writing skills they normally take from an English class, television used as a unit of study could provide students with a lifelong critical skill. With a modest amount of research and reading, and a fairly large dose of television viewing, teachers can become conversant with several television business terms and trends in the industry. (One does not need to be a technician to use television in the classroom, although sooner or later, having students actually using videocameras drives home the difficulty of making programs appear effortless and smooth.) There are several good books and periodicals that provide short courses in the jargon of television as well as contemporary information about the business of the medium, in addition to those mentioned already.

**Additional Sources**

Anderson, Neil. *The Communication Works*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Ungerleider, C. *Television and Society*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing Company, 1985.

Winship, M. *Television*. New York: Random House, 1988.

## STUDENT TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

by Joellen P. Killion
Five Star School–Adams 12, Northglenn, Colorado

Student teachers are a vital part of our teaching staff at the Five Star School–Adams 12, Northglenn, Colorado. In order to provide the best possible program for our student teachers, we implemented the Student Teacher Education Program (STEP) in 1986.

First begun in conjunction with the University of Northern Colorado and now including most of the colleges and universities in the state, STEP has three components that enhance the student teaching experience. The first component contributing to our success is the careful placement of student teachers; the second is training in supervisory skills for cooperating teachers; and the third is training in classroom management for student teachers. Each component will be described in detail below.

Most student teachers and supervising teachers who participate are highly complimentary of the program. Principals are extremely supportive of the program because it provides opportunities to recognize and tap the expertise of their most experienced and successful teachers as well as ensuring successful experiences for student teachers. STEP also reduces the problems associated with student teacher placement by matching student teachers with the most appropriate supervising teachers. University and college coordinators also praise the program because they have found that student teachers in the STEP program require less monitoring and often flourish more quickly.

**Careful Placement of Student Teachers**

Providing supportive and instructional student teaching opportunities strengthens the skills of beginning teachers. The most important opportunity is the chance to work with an experienced teacher. Placement of student teachers in STEP, the first critical component, is coordinated centrally through our staff development department working closely with university student teaching coordinators. Together they determine which cooperating teachers and schools will be most beneficial for student teachers. Student teachers in STEP are placed only with cooperating teachers in the district who have been nominated by their principals as experienced teachers who have the skills necessary to supervise student teachers.

Student teachers who opt not to participate in STEP continue to student teach in our schools; however, approximately 85 percent of the student teachers choose to participate in STEP.

**Training in Supervision**

Student teachers are placed with cooperating teachers who have completed a 20-hour course in the supervision of student teachers. In this course, supervising teachers acquire a basic understanding of the developmental stages of adults and teachers, and appropriate intervention skills for helping student teachers develop both personally and professionally. Supervising teachers learn strategies for interviewing student teachers, collecting data through classroom observation, and conducting instructional conferences with student teachers. They also learn how to assist student teachers in designing a professional development plan and in solving problems with managing classrooms.

**Training in Classroom Management**

For most student teachers, classroom management is the largest hurdle they face. After student teachers are placed in the district, they may choose to participate in a 15-hour course in classroom management, offered on half-days during the first three or four

weeks of a semester. The course is designed to assist student teachers with the immediate problems they face in the classroom. In this training program, student teachers examine issues such as discipline, managing student work, handling administrative tasks, organizing systems to ease their workload, establishing rules and procedures, and teaching students to be independent learners.

Using a problem-solving approach, student teachers receive assistance with current problems and issues they face in the classroom. The greatest advantage of the classroom management training program is the opportunity for student teachers to work closely with other student teachers to discuss their own classroom techniques and to learn how others are solving similar problems. This collegiality promotes dialogue and offers more opportunities for greater growth than working in isolation. This camaraderie has extended beyond the training sessions, as many student teachers establish networks to maintain the exchange of ideas throughout their term at student teaching.

**The Success of STEP**

Many university and college coordinators encourage student teachers to come to our district for their student teaching experience because of the STEP program. Even though our district is not located in a university or college city, we receive a higher percentage of the student teachers each semester than other locations.

The success of STEP can easily be measured by the number of student teachers who are subsequently hired in the district. Many new teachers who are hired in the district have participated in STEP. Approximately 30 student teachers participate in STEP each semester. They believe that they had a successful student teaching experience, and they feel strongly that STEP contributed significantly to their success.

## USING COMPUTERS TO FOSTER COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN THE CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

by Theresa M. Hune
Seneca Valley Junior High School, Pennsylvania

As a relatively new teacher with five years experience, I found myself using too many of the traditional teacher-centered, teacher-as-authority methods which I learned getting my undergraduate degree in education. At some point, I realized that a teacher-centered pedagogy is counterproductive to creative thinking and learning. So, I decided to teach my creative writing course as a collaborative learning workshop. While I knew some of my professional attitudes would have to change, I could not help but wonder if it would be difficult to change the attitudes of my junior high students, who had been taught in mostly traditional ways for their past nine years. I hope to share some insights I gained about how to best incorporate collaboration in the teaching of creative writing.

First of all, I realized that change would take time. I began to study new methods and research in order to learn from other educators' experiences and examples. One notable example was Nancie Atwell's "Writer's Workshop" (*American Educator*, Spring 1989, pp. 14–21), the result of five years of hard work, research, and experimentation into how students write. At first she admits, "I didn't know how to share responsibility with my students, and I wasn't too sure I wanted to" (p. 19). However, when she started to shift her class focus from teacher-centered to student-centered, she saw students "taking chances, trying new subjects, styles and formats . . . taking responsibility" (p. 20) for their work—their writing.

The description of her success and that of her students was exciting, yet I felt that something was missing. When I reread the article, the picture and caption that accompanied it revealed what that "something" was. A photo showed two boys hard at work on their writing; in front of one boy a tape dispenser and a pair of scissors could be seen. The caption read, "Students learn the hard work of revising and make good use of scissors and tape to re-organize the pieces." Of course it is "hard work" if the students have to cut and paste! They need a word processor! Although this article was published in 1989, I realized that much of Atwell's work was done in the early to mid-1980s, when computers and computer labs were not prevalent in the secondary schools. Imagine her success if they had been! I believe the creative and collaborative aspects of Atwell's program can be greatly enhanced through the use of computer word processing.

Research seems to show that computers can provide today's educators and students with opportunities for more creative and productive thinking, learning, and writing. I found the technology—a networked lab of 26 Macintosh computers—available to me and my students with administrative support and encouragement for using it. As a student and educator, I had the desire to learn to use this technology; all that remained was to use the technology to transfer that motivation to my students by integrating computers into my writing curriculum in a positive, productive manner.

One problem present in nearly every curriculum, but one which I wasn't worried about, is a lack of motivation. In a creative writing course that integrates computers, students are motivated not only by the opportunity to use a "new technology," but also by a "new pedagogy" of collaborative learning, perceived by students as increasing their "ownership" of their own work and of the class as a whole. As John Trimbur proposes, "Collaborative learning attempts to channel the informal learning that occurs in student culture into the academic structure of the classroom, to formalize what had existed before only informally, the networks of mutual aid students have always developed on their own" ("Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing," *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*, edited by Ben W. McClelland and Timothy R. Donovan. New York: MLA, 1985, p. 89).

The results of many educational research studies suggest that student collaboration occurs almost naturally within the computer lab environment. Carol Klimick Cyganowski believes that "the computer monitor's suitability to sharing writing, along with word processing's ability to display readable copy throughout, . . . encourages students to make their writing available to readers and to make readers' responses part of their composing and revising process" ("The Computer Classroom and Collaborative Learning: The Impact on Student Writers," *Computers and Community: Teaching Composition in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Carolyn Handa. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1990, p. 69). The physical structure of the computer lab also breaks students naturally into collaborative groups of three or four. Our computer lab at Seneca Valley is set up with three or four computers at each table with the tables in two rows. Our students cannot help but comment on the work they see developing on their neighbors' screens. As a creative writing teacher, I try to strengthen this collaborative atmosphere by making sure a similar opportunity for collaboration exists when my students return to the regular classroom. I organize my classroom in a small-group configuration with six groups of four students each, desks facing each other in a square.

As a result of this desired and inevitable collaboration, new questions arose: Who decides which students work together? How much guidance will the peer groups need to operate? How can peer evaluation or peer composition groups still allow for individual ownership of created works? I found interesting and slightly contradictory opinions in the research. As reported by Dawn and Ray Rodrigues, "Bruffey recommends that [peer groups] stay together all [semester] in order to build trust among group members and to encourage students to care about the quality of help they give to one another" (*Teaching Writing with a Word Processor, Grades 7–13*. Urbana: ERIC and NCTE, 1986, p. 43). Junior high students, particularly, need reassurance that others will not make fun of their work and that they can trust their editors; stable peer groups could help to foster this trust. On the other hand, Cyganowski provides a very valid reason for reforming groups throughout the semester "so that students who are strong in dealing with certain kinds of problems are matched with others who could most benefit" (p. 79). A colleague of mine suggested "holding off" on grouping students until their strong and weak points had been "diagnosed" by the teacher, but I felt this might take away from the continuity of the classroom environment. I started with peer groups, so the students perceived the creative writing class as a collaborative effort from day one, not from day twenty or later. Another option is to have students maintain their original groups but allow them occasions to seek out "experts" from other groups who have strong points in particular areas. After evaluating a number of the students' writings, the teacher would compile and post a list of all the students and their area(s) of expertise. Not only would this list be a reference for additional student collaboration, but it could also serve as a motivation for all students.

A real concern which needs to be addressed if students are to feel comfortable in peer groups and in the computer lab where their work may be seen easily by others is the fear that someone else evaluating their work will steal their ideas. The best approach to this problem comes from Wendy Bishop, who suggests class discussions about ownership and about the possibility of truly original ideas. She tells her students that writers borrow themes, symbolism, etc., from other writers, and it is a "compliment to imitate another's work." (*Released into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing*. Urbana: NCTE, 1990, p. 121). However, Bishop also requires her students to chart "what they believe to be their own inventions," discoveries, triumphs, and disappointments in a weekly journal.

It is important to lessen the sometimes antagonistic attitude some writers and editors have toward peer editing. Cyganowski suggests that peer evaluators first give the writer an overall "sense impression," their understanding of the writer's entire piece, before pointing out any "errors." She asks them to type responses at the end of the draft with prompts such as "What I see is . . ." and "What I think you're saying is . . ." (p. 76). In later drafting stages, she encourages evaluators to "comment on at least paragraph-length sections of text rather than inserting comments or corrections on specific words and sentences" (p. 77). Cyganowski also has students practice "questioning" the writer about the work, and she provides an excellent list of questions.

Dawn and Ray Rodriques advocate that "students . . . insert their suggestions in brackets within a peer's writing [and] help one another find errors in spelling or punctuation [by] placing an asterisk on either side of a misspelled word" (pp. 44–45). James Strickland offers a similar idea by suggesting students use triple spacing to leave their editors room to type in comments, perhaps in capital letters that will stand out (*Computer Strategies for Writers*, unpublished manuscript, 1991).

Many of my ideas came from educators who did not teach with the aid of computers, yet I asked myself how those ideas could be adapted to work with such technology. Of course, students themselves provide the class with innumerable suggestions for creative writing activities, through the collaborative nature of the class and the computer lab environment.

In the same way that computers are feared as "new technology," collaborative learning is often considered a "new pedagogy" by educators reluctant to try it in their classrooms. Yet in order for both of these "new" ideas to be applied and used successfully, the attitudes of traditional teachers and administrators need to change.

## SENTENCE COMBINING: A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

by Jace Condravy
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

Based on their experiences of teaching "noun to June" over and over again, many teachers, if they are not already convinced, have begun to at least suspect that traditional sentence work done with students has no discernible impact on their writing. Yet, despite the well-documented touting of the process approach to teaching composition, many are not ready to completely abandon working with student writing at the sentence level. Sentence combining appears to offer an alternative to a traditional grammar approach, one still focusing on the sentence unit yet interfacing well with process-oriented goals.

Sentence combining offers, especially to less-experienced writers, an extensive, accessible, nonthreatening, even playful opportunity to explore and manipulate sentence structures and punctuation systems. Sentence combining engages students immediately in a fruitful activity, developing confidence in their writing, increasing their syntactic maturity, and familiarizing them with aspects of the writing process.

### Instructional Advantages

Mastering grammatical terminology sometimes creates a formidable stumbling block for students struggling to improve their writing. Sentence combining immediately plunges students into producing complete, complex sentences on a regular basis without having to learn such terminology, an attractive instructional feature. Sentence combining is a synthetic rather than analytic method to building skills, stressing a *learning by doing* approach rather than a *learning by knowing about* approach.

Sentence combining also removes from students the onus of having to find the one correct answer, an unfortunate feature of many grammar exercises. Students are at first suspicious and then quite pleased to discover that, even though the combinations they produce may differ from their classmates', their sentences are just as likely to be acceptable alternatives. Sentence-combining practice encourages and rewards students' explorations of the many structural options they can generate to express one idea. The success that many students experience with sentence combining builds the kind of confidence that allows them to take further risks in their writing, a condition necessary for improving any skill. Furthermore, sentence combining moves students from regarding their first sentences as immutable to change, written in concrete, to perceiving that they have optional ways in which to express a thought, the first of which may not necessarily be the best. In other words, sentence combining familiarizes students with the process of revising, at least at the sentence level.

Third, sentence combining temporarily removes from students the necessity of having to generate their own material. While not

advocating that teachers neglect showing their students how to generate material that can be shaped into a composition (in fact, some open-ended sentence-combining exercises encourage invention), I note that for many inexperienced writers, writing is an even more complex activity than it is for those with adequate writing skills. Many of the processes that occur automatically for the experienced writer require much concentration and energy from the inexperienced writer. For example, basic writers encounter difficulty with the simple scribal act of formulating readable letters. They worry about spelling even the simplest of words, often choosing their vocabulary based on their spelling skills. And determining whether to punctuate the end of a thought with a period or a comma presents real difficulties. It is no wonder that they regard a sentence once formulated as one carved in stone, incapable of being changed. Sentence combining provides the sentence content for the students, relieving them of one of the writer's tasks, so they can concentrate their energies on exploring and manipulating syntactic structures.

Sandra Stotsky suggests that a major benefit of sentence combining is that it eventually may make the constructing of sentences almost automatic, thereby freeing mental energy for other aspects of the composing process ("Sentence Combining as a Curricular Activity: Its Effect on Written Language Development and Reading Activity," *Research in the Teaching of English* 9 [1975]: 30–71). Mina Shaughnessy makes a similar suggestion when she compares sentence combining to finger exercises in piano or bar exercises in ballet which "enable performers to work out specific kinds of coordination that must be virtually habitual before the performer is free to interpret a total composition" (*Errors and Expectations*. New York: Oxford, 1977, p. 77).

**Research Support**

Finally, I advocate the use of sentence combining because research offers ample support that it increases students' syntactic maturity and frequently results in an overall improvement in students' writing as well.

Kellogg Hunt (*Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels*. Urbana: NCTE, 1965) coined a term, the T-unit, to describe a trend in writing which he discerned as students progressed developmentally: as students grew from fourth graders to professional writers, the length of their T-units increased. He defined a T-unit as an independent clause plus any of its attached or embedded phrasal or clausal modifiers—in plain English, an independent clause plus everything that goes with it.

Those who practice sentence combining significantly increase their T-unit length, number of clauses per T-unit, and number of words per clause. This was demonstrated by Frank O'Hare (*Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction*. Urbana: NCTE, 1973) and Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg ("Sentence Combining and College Composition," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 51 [1980]: 1059–1157) working with seventh graders and first-year college students respectively.

Sentence combining seems to make students more aware of the syntactic options that they are already able to produce as part of their inherent language competence and to give them the opportunity to practice these options until they become part of the repertoire of structures readily available to them when they compose. Presenting this technique in a rhetorical context seems to produce gains in writing quality as well. Readers who holistically rated pre- and posttest essays also found the essays of the experimental groups to be better in overall quality than the control groups in both the O'Hare and the Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg studies.

**Teaching Techniques**

Sentence combining can be used in a variety of ways in the classroom. First, to increase their experience with a wide range of syntactic structures, students can practice cued exercises, which explicitly guide them to practice a particular kind of sentence structure. They may be asked to reduce some sentences to participial phrases and add that information to an independent clause. Or students may be asked to reduce sentences to subordinate clauses and embed that information in an independent clause. Although cued exercises may be done first in isolation, they can be followed by uncued whole discourse exercises in which students are encouraged to try the practiced structure within a longer series of short, uncombined sentences about one theme to produce ultimately a unified paragraph. The following example is from Martin McKoski and Lynne Hahn (*The Developing Writer*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1984, p. 95):

My daughter is very interested in clothes.
She is a four-year old.
She is a typical girl.

She will wear only dresses and skirts.
The dresses are feminine.
The dresses are pastel.
She wants to look pretty.

She refuses to wear long pants.
She refuses to wear long sleeves.
She refuses to wear heavy socks.
She refuses to wear a winter coat.

She pulls on winter boots.
She gladly pulls them on.
The boots are heavy.
The boots are bulky.
Cheerleaders wear them.
Cheerleaders are girls that are pretty to her.

I have often left her alone to make her own choices about clothes.
I know that even four-year-olds need to assert themselves.

A seventeen-year-old basic writer, Michelle, transformed the series to produce:

My four-year old daughter, a typical girl, is very interested in clothes. Wanting to look pretty, she will wear only feminine, pastel dresses and skirts. She refuses to wear long pants or sleeves, heavy socks, a winter coat, but she gladly pulls on heavy, bulky winter boots, for cheerleaders, girls that are pretty to her, wear them. Knowing that even four-year olds need to assert themselves, I have often left her alone to make choices about clothes.

And another basic writer, Gary, wrote:

My daughter, a typical four-year old, is very interested in clothes. She'll wear only feminine, pastel dresses and skirts, wanting to look pretty. Refusing to wear long pants or sleeves, heavy socks or a winter coat, she will, however, gladly pull on winter boots, heavy and bulky, because cheerleaders, who are pretty girls, wear them. I have often left her alone to make choices about clothes because I know that even four-year-olds need to assert themselves.

Cued sentence-combining exercises also provide ample opportunity to teach a punctuation system that becomes apparent as students begin to embed and add phrases and subordinate clauses to independent clauses. Many correct examples of how to cor-

rectly punctuate the new structure are available to students using sentence-combining models, and they regularly practice these punctuation systems, which can be presented to them as guides for their readers through the newly combined sentences. Also, students can be encouraged to use the structures they have been practicing in other pieces they are writing. Within a five-week period, I have watched educationally disadvantaged students with underdeveloped writing skills correctly and effectively incorporate participial phrases, appositives, and absolutes into their writing at will.

Sentence-combining exercises may also be used as an invention technique to help students explore topics and generate ideas. Following an exercise that reflects the use and contribution of sensory details to an effective description, William Strong suggests that the students take a close look at a place where they sometimes eat lunch and pay attention to the details of the table—the food, the silverware—anything that is real and immediate (*Sentence Combining: A Composing Book*. New York: Random House, 1973). Then he recommends that students write a description that makes this place real for somebody else, concentrating on the feel and smell and color of things. Students may, as an alternative, complete a whole-discourse, sentence-combining exercise that reflects the principles of comparison and contrast, discuss the organization of the exercise, and then explore a topic, following the same general pattern. Other sentence-combining exercises give students opportunities to finish incomplete narratives or expository essays.

Many teachers who use sentence combining agree on the value of having students examine and compare their combinations in light of audience and purpose, for it seems that this approach is what is likely to help students improve their writing overall. These teachers distribute dittoed copies of student-completed, sentence-combining assignments to discussion groups. In their small groups, the students are asked to read the paragraphs aloud and consider questions about quality, choice of syntax, semantic differences, and word choice. Through questions of this sort, students explore how different structures establish coherence, create emphasis, and change tone. In other words, these discussions guide the student writers into an examination of the choices writers make and how these choices affect a reader's perception of the work. Questions similar to these lead students into revising their own work based on a consideration of purpose and audience. Thus, sentence combining can be used to involve students in the revision process, certainly a significant aspect of the composing process.

My decision to use sentence combining in the classroom reminds me of the Mary Poppins lyric, "Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down . . . ": Students often lock their jaws, wrinkle their noses, and shake their heads "no" when English teachers try to interest them in working with sentences, especially when the work is pulled from traditional grammar books full of repetitious exercises. Student anxiety rises, mental blocks go up, boredom masks their faces, and, ultimately, teachers probably accomplish a lot less than their time, effort, and energy warrant. Yet students seem to enjoy the alternative of sentence combining as something of an interesting puzzle. They are usually able to complete the exercises successfully, growing in both their ability and confidence to generate varied and complex structures. Through small-group discussions, they begin to become more conscious of the impact their writing has on readers, and they begin to develop their ability to read critically, a skill essential to revision. Pleased with the response of my students and the change sentence combining effects in their writing, I encourage writing instructors to explore the potential of this instructional strategy in their classrooms.

## TAKING JOHNNY BACK

by Carol Jago
Santa Monica High School, California

For good reason, teachers react with dismay when special education students are put into their classrooms. Already overworked and overextended, we feel underprepared to cope with these students' special needs. Of course, we want what is best for them, but we believe that someone else can do it better than we can and that anywhere else is better than our overcrowded classrooms. Our good reasons, however, must give way to better ones.

### Better Reasons

The creation of a school within a school has not benefitted students with educational handicaps as much as had been hoped. Students in special day classes see themselves as separate from their classmates, lepers almost, when in fact they are no more or less "at risk" than many, many others. Labels have often done more damage than good. Problems persist even under the best of circumstances, as in my high school where the special education teachers are nurturing and hard-working.

By helping students in a manner that sets them apart, the danger is that we unintentionally foster dependency. By denying them access to regular course work, we build in failure as a likelihood outside the protected environment. There are no special education rooms in college or in the work place.

Another compelling reason for returning these students to the regular classroom is the nature of the schoolwork they are given in the resource room. In the name of individualized lessons, the assignments address the isolated skills in which they have been diagnosed as deficient. (Notice how even the language suggests there is something "wrong" with the learner that a special kind of medicine can help.) Too often the worksheets they are given to complete are unrelated to their work in other classes, at least as far as the students can see. There is little interaction between students; they are serviced singly by teachers and aides. Clearly these students, like many others, need help to pass "American Literature," but how much better would it be for the children if their assistance could occur within rather than outside the regular class.

### Into the Mainstream

I had always been one of the teachers that the special education department turned to when they needed to mainstream a student. One day, however, a colleague from the special education department suggested that in addition to putting a group of resource students in my class, she come in a few days each week as well.

The idea appealed to me, although I had no clear plan as to how we might work together. I did not want to waste her expertise by using her an an aide to mark papers or perform other busywork, nor did I want her to work only with the special education students in a corner. I figured that if we were sensitive to the students in the class and to one another, a *modus vivendi* would emerge.

I knew I could learn from watching my colleague work one-to-one with students, something I had done far too little of for reasons of crowd control. I hoped that with another teacher in the class, I would be able to conference more regularly with students. I speculated that she would learn as well by seeing a different kind of English class—literature-based, process writing, skills taught in context. I hoped that she would see that it was the lessons

themselves and not my personality that had helped so many special education students succeed in my class in the past.

My colleague put seven students with widely varying reading and writing skills into my writing workshop class, and she began coming three days a week. Students had no idea who among them was labeled "special ed." They had no trouble adjusting to two teachers in the classroom, and they appeared to make no assumptions about the fact that one of the teachers was from the resource room. Ours was a match made in heaven. In fact, this model will probably only work with teachers who are flexible, can trust one another, and who get along well.

One of the first responsibilites my colleague assumed occurred during class discussions. Realizing that many students are poor auditory learners and need to see the words to stay focused, she began noting key ideas on the board as we talked. In the past, it had been difficult for me to manage both the recording of their ideas and the eye contact necessary to encourage their nervous, reluctant responses. She also made sure all my verbal instructions appeared on the board for easy reference. I spent much less time repeating myself.

With two teachers in the classroom, students received much more appropriate and timely response to their writing. In the past, special education students took their writing drafts to resource teachers for "help" and dutifully had their spelling corrected. This procedure is understandable; few special education teachers are trained in process writing. My colleague saw firsthand that revision is much more complicated and also more interesting than fixing punctuation. With two teachers—two readers—in the classroom, students heard and saw that the meaning of a text is negotiable. We would differ, sometimes intentionally, about a character or story to encourage student discussion.

**Special Education Advantages**

The advantages of this model for special education students are many. In a regular classroom, special education students see age-appropriate behavior modeled. My students learn from their classmates' writing and discussion as well as from the teacher. Teacher expectations are higher. Fewer exceptions are made; special education students can no longer hide behind their labels and handicaps. Students' expectations of themselves rise. Special education students are engaged in lessons that have intrinsic meaning. Special education students do not read to practice their reading but to understand through reading, for example, to learn why Romeo behaved as he did. Special education students do not write to demonstrate a skill but to express something they think and feel.

The advantages for teachers are also many. I learned from my special education colleague how getting close to kids, asking about their homes and lives, can help foster an atmosphere for learning. Young people want to be known. With two adults in the classroom there was more time for this. My special education colleague saw an interactive classroom modeled where all students—special ed, limited English speaking, just-plain-wild—became engaged and could succeed.

Let's bring Johnny back.

## LEADERSHIP AS SHARED VISION

by Joseph I. Tsujimoto
Punahou School, Honolulu, Hawaii

Much of what I've said elsewhere has to do with falling in love again with the music of language, falling in love again, as Jung would say, with the Great Heart speaking to itself of its own greatness—that is, falling in love again with that which led us into the profession of teaching in the first place, where we experimented and practiced with noble hopes and no little joy, when meaning was centered, not on three-day weekends or vacation flights to Vegas and Atlantic City, but on the prospect of becoming great teachers.

As leaders, it seems to me that our primary responsibility is sustaining or resurrecting that affection in our fellow teachers—especially in those who do not have collegial support; in those who are complacent; in those who are overly cynical, having been disappointed by people and systems; and in those who are overworked, surviving under the most trying conditions; in those who feel oppressed and belittled by top-down administrations or fat-bottomed bureaucracies, or an ignorant public; and in those at the brink of dropping out (50 percent in the next five to seven years).

Perhaps it is naive of me to think that such change can occur in teachers without wholesale changes in the school—especially where our concern extends to teachers beyond the English department, extends to the general improvement of education in our whole school. On the other hand, perhaps not unlike your own, there do exist across our nation good schools and excellent schools which do not beg wholesale changes. Yet, in various ways, quiet and loud, they change nevertheless; have changed and will continue to change; being open to change; having acquired the freedom, responsibility, and power to make the changes themselves.

This is one reason good private enterprises succeed for so long. Proactivity, risk taking, and personal growth, like abstract genes, are the essential characteristics of their corporate personality. And directing the whole is a shared vision. According to Peter Senge:

"Shared vision is . . . a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further—if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person—then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. . . .

"At its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question 'What do we want to create?' Just as personal visions are pictures or images people carry in their heads and hearts, so too shared visions are pictures that people throughout an organization carry. They create a sense of commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities. . . .

"[Furthermore] shared vision is vital, for . . . it provides the focus and energy for learning" (*The Fifth Discipline: Mastering the Five Practices of the Learning Organization.* New York: Doubleday, 1990).

And as Senge says, shared vision, which is a product of personal vision, can arise from anyone anywhere within an organizational structure. In my own experience with the English Coalition, shared vision is a potential common to everyone sharing a profession, lying dormant, begging emergence through an open forum, wherein for example, sixty teachers nationwide, K–college, through the process itself are able to form new relationships, redefine the role of the teacher, and articulate in general the means and ends of English education for the twenty-first century. My own commitment, I realized, extended beyond my own classroom and my own kids into a much larger sphere where I discovered unexpected allies and a greater courage in my pursuit of long-term, transcendent goals. Every year I have become a better teacher. Every year I involve myself more in the school's growth.

If your goal is substantive or foundational change in the way teaching and learning are done, you, as leaders, must accommodate the articulation and the harnessing together of individual visions of the people in your school. Whether you know it or not, you have allies in your department, in other departments, even in

administration. You need not work alone; you ought not; nor should your particular vision prevail; nor should you expect of yourself, or be expected by others, to have all the answers. Without duplicity, you are agents of change, "provocateurs," and collaborators—you are teacher-learners in the subtlest, most sophisticated sense. And what marks you out is courage.

Courage: That's what it's all about, says Louis Gerstner, chairman and CEO of RJR Nabisco. Not just following rules set by legislators or councils cemented into perpetuity—but finding radical ways to break the pattern—to get right down to the street and dare teachers and kids to try something new.

For, as a shared vision begins to crystallize, some of you, as representatives, will need to take heart and strike a bargain with the "devil" (the result being his or her conversion to your creed), who may be the principal, the school board, the district superintendent, the state legislature, parents—whoever the fearful may be—promising them that within three to five years the school will cut dramatically its dropout rate, raise test scores (whether you believe in them or not), and motivate a larger percentage of kids to aspire to and indeed go on to college.

Some of your stipulations may include the following: like private schools, private businesses, and some public, school-based management systems, and other public schools that have transcended their own bureaucracies, you will want autonomy, especially control over scheduling, curriculum, practice, books and materials; a three- to five-year moratorium on external means of school evaluation, especially in the beginning when the most dramatic experimentation will be happening, when shortfalls precede long-term improvements; additional teachers and teacher aids to cut class loads and to provide teacher release time for strategic planning and inservice training; repair and renovation to make the school more habitable. And you will probably want to add to this list.

We are beyond the point, in some schools, of solving symptomatic problems with patchwork compromises—clean, quick, cheap solutions that, in the long term, exacerbate primary causes and breed new problems. We must alter the superstructure, reconceptualize and construct a new foundation. And some of us need to act now.

Howard Kerewsky, director of Middle Schools in Howard County, Maryland, says that change is about transformations:

"Transitions . . . are a theoretical construct—they do not exist. There is no way to make a transition in a school. When I hear about people taking three years to make a smooth transition I get suspicious. Metaphorically, think of somebody on a trapeze swinging high overhead, trying to get from trapeze A to trapeze B. Some do it gracefully and some do not, and some fall in the net. But the bottom line is, you cannot get to trapeze B without letting go of trapeze A. That is a *transformation*, not a transition. Those of us who decide we are going to have meetings on the second Tuesday of every month for the next year-and-a-half to decide what we are going to do and to figure out how we can make things smooth are just kidding ourselves. When you let go of trapeze A it is going to be hard, whether you do it next week or next year. You have to let go" (102nd NEASC Annual Meeting).

You let go. As an effective teacher, you must let go. You cannot help but let go, abandoning the lesser for higher mountains to die on. And the highest, at this point, is to engage our students—other people—in their own transformation. Most remarkable, I've found, is that in the process of making change we teach each other to become leaders. Not only do we arouse dormant passions that lead to a collective IQ that exceeds any one individual member's, we also inspire in each other greater compassion—strengthening and transforming our fragile, human relationships.

### *Collaboration Between College English Departments and Secondary Schools* (Winter 1988 issue of *FOCUS*: Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English). James E. Davis and Hazel K. Davis, editors. Ohio University/NCTE No. 07338-019.

by James E. Davis
Ohio University
President, NCTE

Collaboration between colleges and schools is at the center of our profession. NCTE, since its founding in 1911, has supported the ideal of English teachers working together at all levels. And now is an ideal time for entering more aggressively into that endeavor. College presidents and secondary school superintendents are loudly advocating collaboration. Almost every educational reform document recommends, indeed has made a top priority, this type of collaboration. Within the Council, the Conference on College Composition and Communication has a committee on collaboration between college and school writing programs.

The ways to accomplish this collaboration are as many and various as the minds of the collaborators. For instance, the College English Association of Ohio and the Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English held a conference on collaboration between college English departments and secondary schools as a way to generate ideas and to disseminate success stories. Bringing together secondary and college teachers from around the state, it was an impetus for more and better collaboration between colleges and schools. The results of that conference, held in Athens, Ohio, on October 2 and 3, 1987, are reported in *Collaboration Between College English Departments and Secondary Schools*, the Winter 1988 special issue of *FOCUS: Teaching English Language Arts*.

In that issue, Richard Lloyd-Jones, then president of NCTE, reports on the 1987 conference sponsored by the Coalition of English Associations, held at the Aspen Institute in Maryland. This conference brought together 60 English language arts teachers from all levels of instruction. The coalition was formed to "renew our vision of what English should become to serve the students of the next century" (p. 4). Groups such as that could meet on a smaller scale to foster collaboration on local and state levels. As Lloyd-Jones says, "Yes, I can shut my classroom door, publish my specialized scholarship, and work only with the students who come to me. But that, I think, denies the essence of our field, our reason for being. We help people join together in seeing the world. As starters we need to join ourselves together in supporting programs in English" (p. 7).

June Berkley says that the contemporary assaults on education must be countered by joint efforts of college and high school teachers, researchers, and education specialists in order to bring the public attention to real learning efforts. Citing efforts such as the National Writing Project, she says that teachers and researchers can join together and learn from each other—even interchange roles. Berkley praises Youngstown University's public school collaborative program for young authors, Akron University's center for the professional development of English teachers, and Ohio University's special graduate program of year-long appointments for outstanding high school composition teachers to work in the freshman English program, in concert with university composition teachers.

Berkley cites specifically the workshop format of Ohio's Early English Composition Assessment Program and how, in the process of learning more about teaching composition, secondary and college teachers also become better writers themselves. Berkley calls for "a nurturing environment for teacher selfhood" (p. 10), where research questions can be brought forth and discussed by teachers whose daily experience is in a system that more often than not discourages high-level thinking through a fascination with measurable outcomes. English teachers and researchers at all levels need to collaborate to help the public critically appraise popular press reports about, for instance, standardized test results.

Obviously, we need to talk to one another. This can be facilitated by inviting all English teachers and administrators to form a collaborative support alliance, as several teachers from Virginia Tech, the Montgomery County Schools, Radford University, and Radford City Schools in Virginia did as early as 1984. Subsequent meetings of the collaborative support alliance resulted in a mutual sharing of lesson plans and book ideas and a mutual boost in morale. They focused on positive things, such as public relations, keeping English educators up to date, collaborative support, and mentoring of younger colleagues, and always remembered the social aspects of their meetings as well. Anne Canada tells how she felt more confident because others, regardless of their teaching level, valued her ideas and shared some of the same problems. The collaborative support alliance has enabled teachers "to learn from each other, to motivate each other, to inspire each other, and even to get to know each other" (p. 14). The alliance is still active and growing.

English festivals are one of the tried and proven methods of collaboration between colleges and schools, and one of the most successful is the Youngstown State University English Festival. In existence for over a decade, it began as a writing contest and quickly evolved into a celebration of both writing and reading. The festival is held in the spring, with students from grades 7–12 invited during the previous fall. During its three days, it attracts 800 students each day, a limit set by the capacity of personnel and facilities. During the festival students write impromptu essays about the seven books they were required to read before attending, play writing games, attend journalism and creative writing workshops, have book discussions, and attend lectures by at least one author. Their writing is evaluated, and awards are given. Gary Salvner points out that teachers have continually praised the festival, donated their time as judges and leaders, and solicited school PTAs to purchase books and donate prize money.

Poetry contests, like festivals, can be a valuable means of collaboration. William Schultz tells about the Muskingum College, Ohio, poetry contest which has really grown over the years, and aside from an investment in reading and judging time, the contest operates on an annual budget of $400, covering printing, prize money, and refreshments. Scholarships to Muskingum College are offered to juniors and seniors who submit the best poems. Recognizing that the contest is modest as a collaboration instrument, Schultz concludes that "these contests have aided teachers in their task of encouraging students to write and to care about what can be made out of words. Apparently, contests like this can help to validate and legitimize poetry, to inch it upward on the scale a little closer to accounting and auto mechanics and the other really important things" (p. 20).

Bege Bowers and Sandra Stephan have a collaboration project that fosters collaboration between classrooms. Wishing to design assignments that provide "real world" situations for their upper-division writing course taken by education majors at Youngstown State University, they consulted teachers and administrators in area schools to find out what kind of situations and duties typically generate writing. They also asked a group of area teachers enrolled in a graduate course in technical writing. Bowers and Stephan edited a series of case studies for use as assignments in their undergraduate classes which were designed by their graduate students based on their own experiences. They shared these edited cases with other secondary teachers and administrators at meetings and conferences, who in turn further suggested other kinds of writing their students would do. As a result, their students are introduced to rhetorical, ethical, legal, and political complexities inherent in any professional setting and now have the opportunity to do the kinds of writing they will really be asked to do on the job. This demonstrates the importance of ongoing collaboration, "of letting teachers and administrators in the school systems tell us what they want prospective teachers to be able to do" and "of enriched relationships among teachers" (p. 37).

Baird Shuman has worked for years to devise means by which secondary teachers might have more exposure to college English courses. One way he has done this has been to institute a national program bringing some of the best high school English teachers from across the country to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for a full year. These teachers taught sections of freshman English and were allowed to take courses. Each was assigned an experienced instructor in the composition program to act as a rhetoric advisor. The program ran successfully for seven years and has been imitated in a number of other universities. Shuman says it was their "hope that the teachers we brought here would help enlighten our professors about some of the realities of high school teaching and that, by their example, they would help our faculty to gain a respect for high school teachers that it did not universally hold before that program began" (p. 39). Dan Donlan believes that English teachers can become experimenters and researchers and that the data from such research can be used to implement change in the schools. He says, "This kind of research can be most profitably conducted as a collaboration between teacher and university resources. Such a relationship is symbiotic. It brings the teacher closer to a heightened awareness of his or her own teaching and it brings the university researcher closer to the reality of the English classroom" (pp. 43–44).

John Kelbley and George Ware used a survey to discover what ways secondary teachers want to collaborate with their college counterparts. Short courses, conferences, exchange teaching consultation and follow-up, student writing contests, and accessibility to college library and other resouces were among the major suggestions made by teachers. They conclude, "Colleges and universities need to be aware that most middle and high school teachers are home and job bound and have limited mobility; they cannot spend extended periods of time on campus. . . . Colleges and universities must go to the teacher whenever possible" (p. 47). John Simmons used Directed Individual Studies at Florida State University to take a masters program on the road to Panama City, Florida. This collaboration venture taught the teachers on their own turf and dealt largely with their on-scene, real-life teaching and learning concerns.

I hope that someday we will be able to truly say that English teachers at all levels are collaborating as equal partners in a profitable exchange of ideas that will benefit us all.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS— PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–

5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always encouraged.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are welcomed. Inquiries about guest editorship of an issue are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

May 1992 (February 1 deadline):
**Reading and Writing Connections**

October 1992 (July 1 deadline):
**Literacy: The Crisis Mentality**

December 1992 (September 15 deadline):
**Alternative Schools/ Alternative Programs**

February 1993 (November 1 deadline):
**Guest-Edited Issue: Topic To Be Announced**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM-compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced, typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, English Leadership Quarterly, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326. (FAX 412-738-2096).

## CEL ELECTION RESULTS

Winners of the CEL election were announced at the 1991 CEL Conference in Seattle. Dennis Beckmann, Bryan Senior High School, Omaha, Nebraska, and Celestine Lyght-James, Glasgow High School, Newark, Delaware, were elected Members-at-Large. Congratulations to the winners and thanks to all other candidates.


### CEL Executive Committee

**Chair**
Myles Eley
Warren Central High School
9500 East 16th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46229

**Associate Chair**
Paul C. Bellin
Weld County School District #6
811 15th Street
Greeley, CO 80631

**Past Chair**
Wendell Schwartz
Stevenson High School
1670 West Highway 22
Prairie View, IL 60069

**Liaison to NCTE Secondary Section Committee**
Mary-Sue Gardetto
Lakeney Junior High School
4085 Shakertown Road
Beavercreek, OH 45430

**Corresponding Secretary**
Willa Mae Kippes
Valley High School
955 Birch Street
Gilcrest, CO 80623

**Membership Chair**
Mary Ellen Thornton
Patrick Henry Middle School
Houston, TX 77093

**Secretary-Treasurer/ Staff Liaison**
Miles Myers
NCTE

**Members-at-Large**
Dennis Beckmann
Bryan Senior High School
4700 Giles Road
Omaha, NE 68157

Susan Benjamin
Highland Park High School
433 Vine
Highland Park, IL 60035

Kristina M. Elias
Greenwich Public Schools
Greenwich, CT 06830

Thomas Fischer
Lyons Township High School
100 S. Brainard Avenue
LaGrange, IL 60525

Daniel A. Heller
Brattleboro Union High School
Brattleboro, VT 05301

Celestine Lyght-James
Glasgow High School
1901 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19702



**ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY**
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
Champaign, Illinois
Permit No. 85




BEST COPY AVAILABLE